

Aide-de-Camp's Library



सत्यमेव जयते

Rashtrapati Bhavan
New Delhi

Accn. No. 701

Call No. IX (18) - R

FORGOTTEN SKIES

**THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN
COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE
AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS.**

FORGOTTEN SKIES

The Story of the Air Forces in India and Burma

By Wing Commander
W. W. RUSSELL

With a foreword by
Air Chief Marshal Sir RICHARD PEIRSE,
K.C.B., D.S.O., A.F.C.

HUTCHINSON & CO. (*Publishers*) LTD.
LONDON : NEW YORK : MELBOURNE : SYDNEY

TO THE MEMORY OF
WING-COMMANDER ALEC PEARSON, D.F.C.
AT ONE TIME COMMANDING OFFICER
OF 194 SQUADRON, R.A.F.

Made and Printed in Great Britain at

Greycaines

(Taylor Garnett Evans & Co. Ltd.)
Watford, Herts.

PREFACE

THIS BOOK WAS written on a troopship between Bombay and Liverpool in the summer of 1944. Almost immediately on reaching England I was plunged into the affairs of the German Air Force and the Control Commission. After V.E. Day I spent four months in Norway taking part in disarming that air force. Consequently, although the book sets out in a sense to be a history of the R.A.F. and the Royal Indian Air Force in India, Burma, and Ceylon, it is clearly an incomplete story and some of its shortcomings may perhaps be condoned on account of the circumstances in which it was written.

I have made no attempt to carry the story beyond June, 1944, because I was not present in the theatre during the concluding stages of the war, and the essence of the book, as I see it, is the weaving of a personal story into the texture of the air war in the East. It is certain that the tale would have gained if its last chapter could have been written in Rangoon; on the other hand, it is possible that the earlier stages of the battle in 1942 and 1943—when the Press had not yet turned its attention from Europe to the Forgotten Front—are more interesting and less well known.

The Indian Air Force became the Royal Indian Air Force in 1944, after I left India, and is referred to throughout as the I.A.F.

I must thank Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse for his interest and encouragement, both when I was on his staff in India, and later in England, during the preparation of the book. I am also very grateful to Wing-Commander Charles Gardner of SEAC and his staff for their help in procuring maps and photographs; and, above all, to my wife.

W. W. RUSSELL.

31 LOWER BELGRAVE STREET, S.W.1.

23rd September, 1945.

FOREWORD

WING-COMMANDER WILFRED RUSSELL tells in colourful phrases of India's transition from peace to war—in particular, of the building of an Air Force which has played so conspicuous a part, first in the defence of India, then in the mastery of the Japanese Air Force, and so on to the reconquest of Burma.

He tells vividly of the slender and outmoded collection of museum pieces which were India's air defence at the outbreak of war: a state of affairs which persisted up to March, 1942. How with the loss of Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, and in face of a victorious Japanese army pushing General Alexander and his gallant men through the incredible wilds of the Burmese mountains and jungles towards India, the British and American Governments set about finding resources wherewith to stem the tide and forge the weapons of retribution.

He tells of some of the most daring exploits of land and air co-operation ever to be undertaken, linked with the names of Wingate and Cochrane. Of the growth to man's estate of the Royal Indian Air Force and the brilliant reputation that the sons of India have won for themselves in the skies over Burma. All this is told through the medium of a personal story from the pen of a man who has observed much, known many, and can boast an intimate knowledge of India's pre-war and war-time problems.

Wing-Commander Russell brings his delightful and intimate narrative of a little-known campaign to a close with the story of the fusion of the 10th American Air Force and the Royal Air Force into a single Allied Air Command within the supreme command of that vivid personality, Lord Louis Mountbatten. For nearly two years the American and British air commands had worked alongside each other on the common task of defeating the Japanese Air Force and giving support to their respective armies in Burma. It was therefore in an atmosphere of mutual regard and comradeship that the integration into a single allied air command took place.

Wing-Commander Russell leaves before us a picture of the stage set for the final act: with airmen of America, India, the Dominions, the Netherlands, and Britain fighting side by side in one of the greatest and most closely knit allied air forces of the war.

No finer team did any man command—their exploits will always make fascinating reading; and so I commend this book to you.

R. E. PEIRSE.

9th June, 1945.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	5
FOREWORD	6
CHAPTER I. INDIA DECLARES WAR	9
II. JOINING UP	11
III. FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL	12
IV. FIRST COMMAND	17
V. GROUNDED	22
VI. THE FLAP	26
VII. A NEW AIR FORCE	37
VIII. A NEW IDEA	41
IX. FALSE DAWN IN ARAKAN	50
X. CLOSE SEASON FOR CORRESPONDENTS	54
XI. SEAC IS BORN	57
XII. A NEW LEADER	60
XIII. THE FORGOTTEN FRONT	62
XIV. HOMEWARD BOUND	70
XV. LONDON AT WAR	73
XVI. A BOX IN ARAKAN	83
XVII. BROADWAY IN BURMA	90
XVIII. OFFSIDE AT IMPHAL	110
XIX. OPERATION DOUGHNUT	115
NOTES	126
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	128

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INDIA'S FRONT LINE DEFENCES, 1939-1942	<i>face p. 16</i>
COCHIN AERODROME IN MARCH, 1942: Air Arm Fulmar fighter can be seen in the background	,, 17
SIR RICHARD PEIRSE TALKING TO SQUADRON-LEADER MEHAR SINGH OF LYALPUR, THE FIRST INDIAN PILOT TO WIN THE D.S.O.	,, 32
A GROUP OF INDIAN AIR FORCE SQUADRON COMMANDERS: Taken during a conference in Delhi. Two R.A.F. staff officers are in the group	,, 32
AN ATTACK BY BLENHEIMS ON THE JAPANESE-HELD PORT OF AKYAB IN NOVEMBER, 1942	,, 33
A DAKOTA AIRCRAFT OF 31 SQUADRON R.A.F. ABOUT TO LAND BEHIND THE JAP LINES DURING THE 1943 WINGATE OPERATIONS	,, 48
MAJOR-GENERAL WINGATE TALKING TO COLONEL COCHRANE, U.S.A.A.F., SHORTLY BEFORE THE LAUNCHING OF THE 1944 AIR INVASION OF BURMA	,, 49
CROSSING THE CHINDWIN INTO JAP-HELD BURMA—1943 STYLE	,, 64
CROSSING THE CHINDWIN INTO JAP-HELD BURMA—1944 STYLE	,, 65
AN AUSTER LIGHT AIRCRAFT LANDING ON A STRIP BESIDE THE SHWELI RIVER IN CENTRAL BURMA	,, 80
A STRIP AT IMPHAL FROM WHICH AN AMERICAN MITCHELL LIGHT BOMBER IS TAKING OFF: It was in a similar type of aircraft that General Wingate was killed while flying from Imphal to India	,, 80
A HURRICANE FIGHTER-BOMBER COMES IN LOW TO ATTACK A BRIDGE ON THE TIDDIM ROAD	,, 81
THESE THREE PHOTOGRAPHS WERE TAKEN FROM THE NOSE OF A BEAUFIGHTER AS IT WAS ATTACKING A PETROL STORAGE TANK AT THE LADAING TANK FARM, THE FAMOUS OIL REFINERY IN CENTRAL BURMA	,, 96
BEAUFIGHTERS PLAYED AN OUTSTANDING PART IN HARASSING JAP COMMUNICATIONS UNTIL THE ENEMY WAS FORCED TO MOVE ONLY AT NIGHT	,, 97
PICTURE TAKEN BY A BEAUFIGHTER PILOT OF A LARGE IRRAWADDY STEAMER AND TWO BARGES AFTER HE HAD ATTACKED IT AND SET IT ON FIRE	<i>follow p. 120</i>
A SUPPLY DROP OVER JAP-HELD NORTHERN BURMA AS SEEN FROM ONE OF THE DROPPING AIRCRAFT	,, 120
A SUPPLY DROP AS SEEN FROM THE GROUND	,, 120
WING-COMMANDER ALEC PEARSON, D.F.C., who commanded 194 Squadron R.A.F. (known to the Fourteenth Army and its numerous friends as 'the friendly firm') during 1943 and 1944. This picture was taken at Imphal during the siege in 1944. He was killed early in 1945 at Biggin Hill	,, 120

CHAPTER I

INDIA DECLARES WAR

AT THE BEGINNING of the war India could not even claim the status of a Forgotten Front. It was regarded by the more fortunate people of England as a peaceful place, flowing with whisky and petrol, far beyond the threatening arm of the *Luftwaffe* and the shadow of the Panzers. In India we could be excused for feeling envious of the front-line citizens of England and ashamed at our uninterrupted way of life. We didn't know, of course, that for the first nine months of the war life was as little changed in England as in India, and by the time our feeling of guilt had become firmly established the sufferings of our friends and relations at home had become so evident that we settled down into a resigned inferiority complex, the depths of which few people in England and, later, North Africa could have appreciated.

We read each day about the Battle of Britain and then the Blitz of London, Coventry, Liverpool, and Plymouth. At week-ends we played golf; in the summer we went to Kashmir; on Saturday nights we danced. But it was always with a feeling of guilt—until even that was almost forgotten. We didn't know that all the time we had been torturing ourselves the West End hotels were doing a roaring business and that after the first instinctive reactions to a state of unexpectedly theoretical warfare during the winter of 1939, even the theatres had reopened in the West End of London.

In 1939 India's visible defences consisted mainly of the Indian Army with some units—chiefly infantry—of the British Army.

The R.A.F., whose war-time story in India is sketched very briefly in this book, was scarcely to be seen anywhere. It consisted at the most of half a dozen squadrons, which had been stationed in India since 1919 and whose personnel changed every four years as the officers and men completed their overseas tour. Thus it had little connection with the country and stood in a very different relation to it from the Indian Army which, especially among the martial races, enjoyed considerable prestige. It had been commanded at various times by men who either had made their mark in the service or were shortly to do so, most noteworthy among whom were probably Sir John Salmond and Sir Philip Joubert. Among its ranks it counted at various times junior officers who have made big names for themselves in this war: Air Vice-Marshal Embry and Air Vice-Marshal Baker. Aircraftsman Shaw was its most famous other rank.

Even in 1939 the contribution of this small air force—with its outmoded aircraft—to the increasingly successful policing of the north-west frontier had scarcely been realized by the outside world. It took some time to appreciate a new strategical truth: the truth that a few squadrons of aircraft could do the work of whole divisions. Even Yeats-Brown, who had done so much to glamourize the Indian Army, had gone over to the rival firm and flown with the R.A.F. as long ago as the last war, in which he won the D.F.C.

The shores of India were protected by the East Indies Squadron of the Royal Navy, which operated so far from the shores of the sub-continent that few were aware of this, the most potent factor in the defence of India. Indeed,

it was only at Christmas time when the flagship tied up in the Hooghly for ten days of racing, cricket, and well-earned relaxation for the crews that the civilian population ever came in contact with its real shield and defender. It was not until 13th December, 1942, that the realization of the fundamental importance of naval power, especially in the Indian Ocean and the China Seas, came home to Indian and Englishman alike. The Royal Indian Navy, like its counterpart the Indian Air Force, existed more on paper than in fact.

Politically, India was in a more promising frame of mind than probably at any time of her more recent history. The Government of India Act, passed by Parliament in 1935, had got into its stride after a ragged start and was proving to be a resounding success. Unhappily the Federal part of the Act which was to bring the autocratic Princes into a political relationship, however slender, with the peoples' parliaments had not yet started to function. Nevertheless, the provincial legislatures, seven of which were dominated by Congress majorities and cabinets, had been working remarkably well for two years and the erstwhile revolutionary party was showing all the traditional signs of a movement away from revolutionary gospels towards responsibility and constructive work. Goodwill was growing imperceptibly under the unexpectedly cordial joint chairmanship of Congress premiers and English governors, of whom Lord Brabourne and Mr. Kharin in Bombay had been the outstanding examples.

Then came the declaration of war by India against Germany. The Congress ministries, which were shaping so well, resigned, and there was no alternative but for the I.C.S. and the Governors to take over the country. In one day India went back thirty years. One of the most noticeable effects of this step was naturally the alienation from the war effort of many people, young and old, who would have been of great assistance in building up a greater and even more spectacular war effort than India has in fact displayed in spite of the political deadlock.

Thus by the time France had capitulated to the Germans India presented a curious spectacle. Outwardly life was unchanged from pre-war days. Indians took only an academic interest in the war. The students were anti-fascist on intellectual grounds; the merchants saw prospects of increased trade. The politicians, as usual, saw in England's difficulties their own imagined opportunities. Under the surface there was a stirring of the pulses of the few thousands, Indians and English, who were in positions of influence. The three hundred and fifty millions of the people were not at that time affected in any way. On the surface life went on as it had always done and there were race meetings on the beautiful courses of Bombay and Calcutta every Saturday afternoon.

It was against this background of remoteness from the great German war that I joined the R.A.F. in India. For the first two years of my service even the fact that I was flying failed to remove that sense of guilt and that conviction of uselessness which many besides myself felt in India and still feel. It was, I suppose, the forerunner of that mass nostalgia and loneliness among an indifferent, sometimes sullen, native population which much later was to become a problem for the war cabinet, summed up in those now well-known phrases 'Forgotten Army' and 'Forgotten Front'. In the chapters which follow an attempt is made to trace the development mainly of the R.A.F. from the prehistoric days of 1939, through the time of the Forgotten Front to the present moment when the personality of Mountbatten and the genius of Wingate, aided by the immense technical equipment and courageous air

assistance of the Americans, have lifted India and Burma from obscurity to the headlines of the world's Press, and have thereby not only won back a large part of northern Burma for the Allies but focused the attention of London and New York on the men who have learned, under far more difficult conditions than Normandy, Italy, or the Desert, to fight and conquer an enemy more dangerous and more barbarous even than the Germans.

CHAPTER II

JOINING UP

ON 24TH AUGUST, 1939, I was with my brother, Gilbert, in Salzburg. We had seen *Figaro* and the *Escape from the Seraglio*. We had tickets for two or three more operas and were sitting in a café on the river when we read the astounding news of Ribbentrop's pact with Russia. I was lucky enough to get hold of a copy of the *Observer*. Garvin's article, 'The Sword of Damocles', made my hair stand on end, as it was impossible to get a correct perspective from the German and Austrian Press. In an hour we had packed our bags, left our precious opera tickets behind and were on the *autobahn* for Munich. We were let out of Germany with difficulty, as we were smuggling currency for some Jewish friends—they stripped us and the car at Hoechst on the Swiss border—and, driving hard, we reached London two days later. There followed an unsuccessful attempt to get into the R.A.F.—which I regretted a lot—and a successful one to get into the Ministry of Information—which I regretted even more. After three weeks of playing noughts and crosses with Lionel Fielden in Malet Street, during which time I wrote an article on Poland, I asked Harry Hodson to release me from his Empire Division, as I was sure the India Section could very well get on without me. It had always been my ambition to be a civil servant and go to work at a ministry wearing a black felt hat—how often at Davies', cramming for the Foreign Office and the Consular, we had dreamt of that day—now it had come without exams or any of the deadly slogging of five years back; but it was no good, in those early weeks of winter '39 there was no work to do, and if there had been, young men should be elsewhere.

After three weeks Harry Hodson let me go and two days later Lord Camrose cleared out many of those nine hundred and ninety-nine oddities, many of whom were even odder than Evelyn Waugh has painted them. I decided that in India I could probably do something more useful and interesting than seemed possible in London during those listless days of autumn '39, which was an odd thought, but as it turned out a good one. In India, where there was no Air Force to speak of and certainly no Reserve or Territorials, I found myself by one of those amazing strokes of luck given a commission in the R.A.F.V.R. within a short time of returning to Bombay. Reay Geddes, with whom I had corresponded in Calcutta at the beginning of the year about Chatham House, had been given the job by Wing-Commander Bussell from Air Headquarters, Delhi, of raising a Coast Defence Flight from the young Indians and English-

men of Bombay, a flight which would be trained in India and return to Bombay to do Coastal Reconnaissance.

It was a grand idea and I was enthusiastic to get into it. On 28th October, Gordon Lancaster* and I filled in our form, were interviewed at Juhu by a hastily organized travelling board, and having nearly burst ourselves keeping the mercury up the tube, found ourselves accepted. What is more, my firm, as on so many other occasions, made no difficulties and released me.

And so in the middle of February, 1940, I found myself in a famous cavalry cantonment in the north of India, standing in a line in civilian clothes while a godlike but tolerant flight-sergeant recalled 'form fours' from the mists of the past. On my right was Mervyn Thomas in corduroy trousers and wearing a splendid gorblimey. We had raced against each other in the 'Varsity ski match at St. Moritz in 1933, and there were other friends, both Indian and English. At last it seemed as if the war had started for me in earnest, though in fact I had run 7,500 miles away from it in order to find someone who would give me a uniform and teach me the business. Then Mervyn pointed out that the Russians and the Germans were allies and the Russians would, of course, have to come through the Khyber Pass, because that was what the North-West Frontier was for, or what the Army thought it was for. Why else were Probyn's Horse and the Jodhpur Lancers here?

So we formed fours and trailed off under the disapproving eye of 'Flight'. This was my second attempt at finding a niche in our war machine. It looked a more promising one than Malet Street.

CHAPTER III

FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL

THE R.A.F. HAS set its schools in some of the loveliest places of the Commonwealth, but the one of which few people have heard tell, for it only lasted a year, must have been hard to beat for surroundings and climate. We arrived in the middle of the winter, when it was so cold that at night five blankets and a roaring fire were barely enough to keep you from shivering. We started flying in the early morning and you had only to reach 3,000 feet for the panorama of the Peshawar valley and the mountains of the Hindu Khush to unfold in the crisp air below. After five years of desk life in the humid offices of Bombay this freedom in the cold blueness of morning surrounded by snowcaps was an unexpected and exhilarating experience. It was also a pleasant change to be free from responsibilities; to be ordered about; to get up and go to bed at set times; to do P.T. in the mornings and learn mathematics in the afternoons. I think what made us all accept this new discipline so easily, apart from the relief that we were at last in uniform, was the sensible way in which the R.A.F. taught its lessons and the speed with which we were able to test theory with practice.

One of the best things about Risalpur were the pupils. I think even the instructors would have agreed there. Wing-Commander Bussell, now an Air

* See Note 2.

Commodore, had hit on a brilliant idea. That it was only worked for long enough to prove its brilliance and was then dropped was no fault of his and was largely due to the catastrophic evolution of the war. The Indian Air Force had been started in 1933. On the outbreak of war it consisted of one highly trained all-Indian squadron. At that time the R.A.F. had a few squadrons in the country, mostly stationed on the North-West Frontier, whose rôle was to police the tribal territories. All these squadrons were equipped with obsolete aircraft, some with Wapitis, other more lucky units with the incomparably superior Hawker Hart. The 3,000 miles of coastline with its important harbours was being looked after by detached flights of the single Blenheim Squadron in the sub-continent. This famous squadron would obviously be wanted soon for duties elsewhere, as would the other regular squadrons.

Bussell planned to raise five Coast Defence Flights from among the Indians and Englishmen who lived in the five big ports of India. He planned to train them at Risalpur and return them to their own home ports for coastal reconnaissance work. He personally visited Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, and Karachi to choose the Flight Commanders, to whom he gave a more or less free hand in their choice of officers. His policy, a wise one, was that emphasis was to be on the choice of young Indians with a sprinkling of young Englishmen. It was my acquaintance with Reay Geddes, who raised the Bombay Flight, which brought me into the R.A.F. Bussell chose his Flight Commanders well, and my first night in the mess at Risalpur convinced me that the idea would be a success.

Stephen Kaye, a young Calcutta steel merchant, had selected some of the best Indians and Englishmen from Calcutta. He arrived himself in his old yellow Rolls, shortly followed by an inseparable and exceptional pair of young Indians, Hem Chaudheri and Drabendra Bhanjdeo. I remembered them both from Cambridge days. They have both made their mark in this war. Then there was Mervyn Thomas, who brought his polo ponies and thus gave us prestige with the cavalry regiments. Mervyn and I had raced together on the Corviglia at St. Moritz. We swapped many yarns about Switzerland and our friends, most of whom had gone into the Air Force.

From the south I met Donald Law and Johnny Hill who had, it seems, been characters in Madras for many years. Donald commanded the Madras Flight. He had flown for years and was resentful of the lessons and the discipline. He was always talking of the times when he was in Douglas Farquhar's flight in Glasgow's Auxiliary Squadron. We used to pull his leg about it until one day the papers carried a story about the first German aircraft to be shot down over Britain in this war. As far as I remember, it had fallen to Douglas Farquhar himself, and the German is reported to have said afterwards, "and to think I was shot down by a bloody barrister!" Donald was insufferable for days.

The young Indians were outstanding—particularly Drabendra Bhanjdeo, heir to the State of Mayurbhanj in Bengal, who found a Maharajah rather a bind, so much was he ragged; his humour and his flying ability were outstanding. He was killed in a Hudson during an offensive reconnaissance against the Jap fleet in the Bay of Bengal in the Spring of 1942.

In our bungalow among the English pupils we often used to talk about the Indians and discuss whether they would ever be any good in the air. Some of us advanced the old cliché ideas that they were slow and lacked initiative. I could only judge from those at the F.T.S., who were universally good.

As time went on I formed some strong views on this point, as for over

eighteen months I commanded operational units in which there were a majority of Indian officers and other ranks. At the school there was no doubt they took longer to learn than the Englishmen and, on the whole, they were not as quick in the written part of the work, but they flew well and most of them had guts. Some of them were natural leaders, but, on the whole, they wanted leadership and would do anything for a man they liked and trusted. The Englishman who bullied and was impatient got nowhere with them, and here some of the regular R.A.F. officers failed. What it seemed to amount to—and my later experience bore this out more and more—was that those young Indians from good families, who had discipline and strength of character before they joined up, took easily to flying and made first-class officers. Unfortunately the army had claimed so many of these that when the first flight had been taken into the R.A.F. the second layer had to be taught citizenship as well as aviation, and of course in war-time there was neither the time nor the system available for that.

It was glorious to fly over that valley and see the signs of early history, then take out the car to inspect them more closely. Round the rich village of Mardan, a few miles up our road, there was a great deal of interest. I first saw the great Buddhist monastery of Takhti Bhair from a hill when I was trying to do slow rolls. It was an exciting moment, as I had tried to find it in the car several times without success. There it lay within a stone's throw of the road, tucked into the seat of a mountainous armchair whose back was to the road and the plain, while the cunning old monks had achieved an undisturbed view of the snowcaps and sheltered themselves from the outside world.

Another time I went to Taxila which was not a great deal to show the layman of Alexander's three years in India, but many beautiful Greek and Buddhist figures and coins have been preserved in the little museum. The setting in the Haro valley is entrancing. It was in this part more recently that John Nicolson rode furiously to and fro during the Sikh wars, winning the devotion of so many Indians and the hatred of so many English bureaucrats. His monument in the gap near Taxila often saved a straying pupil who had lost his way. Two other helpful landmarks nearby were the chimneys and kilns of my firm's cement factory at Wah and the broad, flowing waters of 'cousin brother Indus' down whose muddy stream Alexander had sailed his dispirited soldiers on their way out of India.

At week-ends I used to drive over to Peshawar where Osman Baig—an Indian friend in the I.C.S.—and his Turkish wife were the most friendly hosts imaginable. Osman was city magistrate. One day Dr. Khan Sahib, the Congress prime minister of the N.W.F.P., came to tea. He was no longer in office, as the Congress ministries had resigned in October '39 on the grounds they had not been consulted about going to war with Germany. He was kind and jovial. Later, on Martyrs' Day,* when all sorts of trouble is expected and the different factions parade through the bazaar fully armed, I saw him walking side by side between rows of the most inflammatory warriors of the country with Bertie Smith, the Deputy Commissioner, chatting and exchanging jokes in such a way that the utmost confidence and quiet prevailed. Not long before Osman had jailed him. To-day he was having him to tea. Politics in India can be very friendly, and especially between Englishmen and Indians of goodwill.

The traditional forum of goodwill and friendship is the cricket ground.

* See Note 2.

One week-end we played a match in Peshawar on the beautiful little ground where Tennyson's team had played the year before. It was the best game in which I had ever taken part. Johnny Hills had got together a good team from the instructors, the pupils and the airmen. The latter were very keen. By practising in the nets and by some good luck our team had reached the final of the N.W.F.P. tournament for which the Governor gave a cup. I have not played any serious cricket since school and was not even considered for the rounds until one day Mervyn and I decided to put on our M.C.C. ties. Johnny saw the flash of colour and insisted I should play in the final against a good Indian club team. Protests about non-playing membership were of no avail and of course, as so often happens, I more than justified my 'ask'.

We won the toss and, despite a dry batsman's wicket, Johnny made one of those brilliantly unorthodox decisions which sometimes disconcert an orthodox opponent. They whooped with joy and sent in their centurions who—they lost no time in telling us—had done well against Tennyson on the same ground. We had an Anglo-Indian boy, an airman, who bowled very slow leg-breaks and googlies, the most unsuitable balls for that wicket, but he found a length, broke his ball more than a yard on the hard turf and confounded the over-confident experts. He took eight wickets for sixty-odd runs and we had them out for just over a hundred. It was almost unbelievable, as we never really thought there was a chance of even making a game of it.

Then we batted and 'Fiery',* the station C.O., mad keen on cricket, went in first. He was fired at by the local Larwood who hit him on the backside, on his head and in the face, but he wouldn't give up, although he had to have a runner, which was happily me. I got thoroughly warmed up running for the numerous bounces off Fiery's body until he was bowled for a bloody but unbowed twenty-seven. I was in next and my eye was so set after the running that I collected over fifty. Chris Wright, our delightful navigation instructor, who was later killed in his Lancaster over Berlin, got fifty and we put up a fine total of over two hundred. In their second innings they did a little better, but this time our fast bowler, Corporal Renton, the medical orderly, struck form, and with Corporal Thomas, our redoubtable rugger-playing wicket-keeper, disposed of most of the opposition. I remember adding to my already alarmingly bogus reputation as a cricketer by holding a mighty catch on the boundary. We had to get about one hundred and fifty to win and managed it without difficulty. Fiery was overjoyed and we took the Cunningham Cup back to Risalpur next day. That night he had all the airmen in the team up to the officers' mess and we drank all the beer he could provide from the cup. It was then I heard—for the first time—those glorious Air Force songs of the old regulars born in the heat of the Persian Gulf and Iraq—'Shaibah Blues', 'A Troopship leaving Bombay', 'When your engine cuts out you've got no — at all'. We sang late into the night and for the first time I was allowed into the privileged company of the old regular R.A.F., than which there can have been no finer body of men. From that night on we were often in the Sergeants' and Corporals' mess, playing tennis with them, drinking with them and learning from them. It was my introduction to Lawrence's air force, and appropriately many of them had known Lawrence in Miramshah and Karachi. "A quiet fellow, but wherever he was the lot of the 'erk' was lighter than on other stations." From what I was beginning to see of the N.C.O.s and men, nothing could be too good for them.

All this time we were flying hard and working at our navigation, as coastal

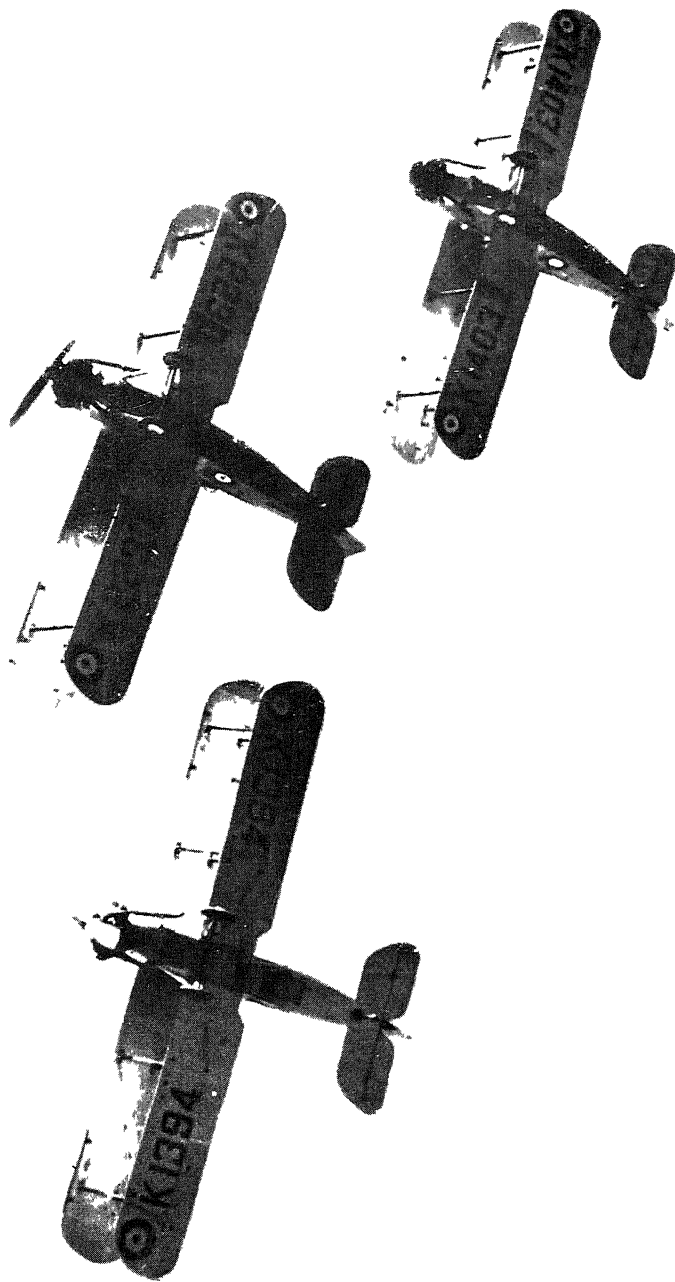
* See Note 3.

reconnaissance in land aircraft was to be our rôle. Perhaps because we were lucky, perhaps because we were older than the usual run of pupils, there were few accidents and no fatalities, so there is nothing exciting to recall in our flying. The most amusing incident of the course was towards the end when we were warned that an important foreign deputation was to visit us and we were all to be on our best behaviour. What's more, it was important to show the visitors—they turned out to be from Thailand—how strong we were in the air. This was not easy in view of our handful of Wapitis and Harts, but by chance 27 Squadron, who had been condemned to the soul-destroying task of teaching us how to fly, had started to re-equip with Blenheims. To us and to them these were the last word in modernity. So Fiery arranged an elaborate programme in which the three Blenheims flew in from different directions at different times and tried to look like thirty Blenheims, while we darted all over the sky and tried to look like a very busy and prosperous F.T.S. Sadly the Thailanders arrived late and went to the wrong part of the station. I had just landed and was walking across the tarmac when their cars drew up and a mighty Scot in kilts got out. I was the only person there and had to sit in front in my dirty overalls directing them to the red carpet where Fiery and his men were waiting impatiently at Station H.Q. I slipped out of the far door and crept away while the immaculate white uniforms and gold braid got out on the other side. As they did so the three Blenheims swept overhead for the tenth and last time.

The little men looked polite and impressed, but I imagine they returned to their country convinced that the big battalions were east not west of their borders, while we were happy in the knowledge that even if we did have only three Blenheims the Crown Prince had been to Harrow and had raced at Brooklands.

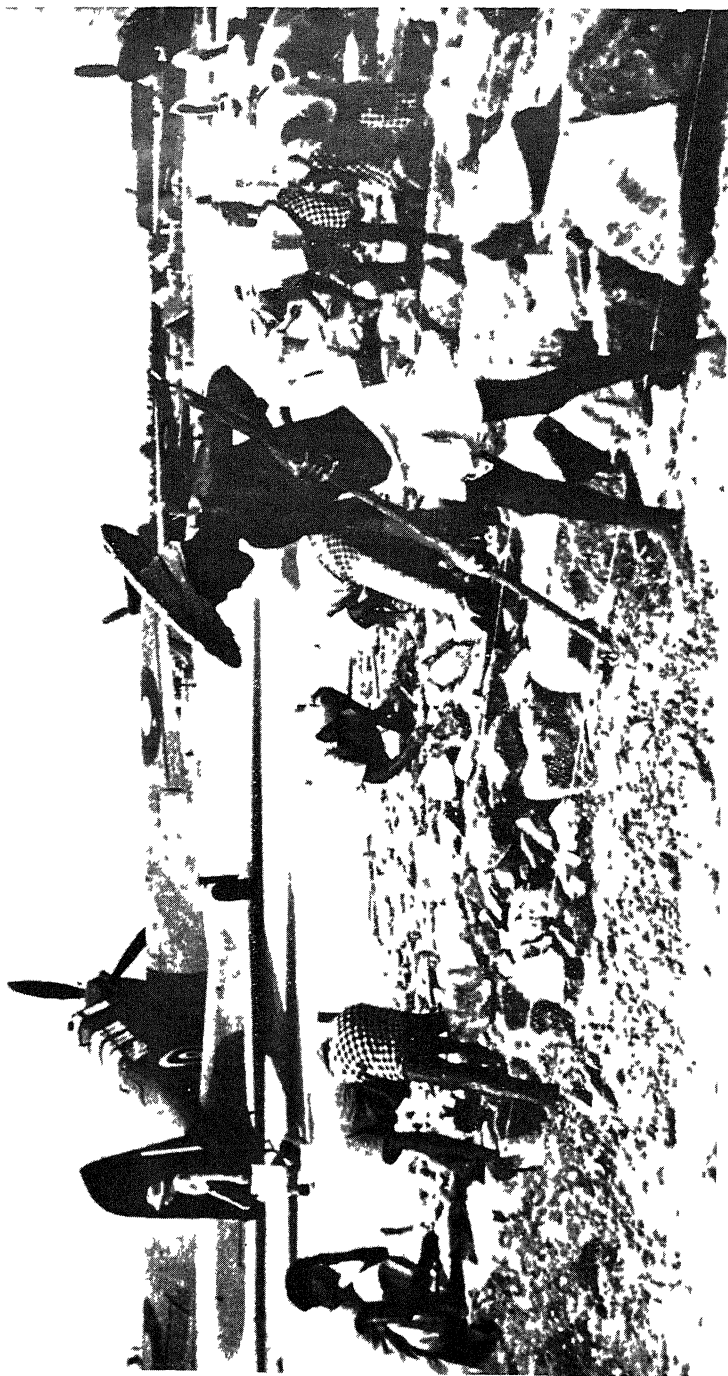
The time went by quickly, too quickly; the Maharajah of Jodhpur sportingly insisted on going right through F.T.S. to win his wings as an honorary Air Commodore, which at the age of forty is pretty good. He cycled with us from lecture to lecture and, I am glad to say, found his maths as difficult as I did. He gave magnificent parties and his cavalry regiment—also stationed in Risalpur—put on the best polo to be seen in India with Pritipal Singh, Hanut, and himself the stars. Stephen Kaye was recalled to business and Hem Chaudheri took command of the Calcutta flight. He was the first Indian C.O., and we were all very pleased as both Hem and his friend, the Maharajah of Mayurbhanj, were outstanding flyers with masses of guts. We were inspected by the A.O.C., Air Marshal Higgins, and our C.G.I., Andy Baird—with whom we were always crossing swords—delighted us by inadvertently giving 'eyes left' at the march past and making us all look the wrong way.

In October, 1940, the course came to an end and we flew away to our respective ports. On the way down to Bombay I had my first adventure. I was leading a small formation of pupils on what at that time was by far my longest cross-country flight. All went well on the first leg, then I suppose I got careless and over-confident. Anyway, I soon lost my way. After a while we came to a big town and I decided there was nothing for it but to come down into the railway station and read the name on the platform. I signalled the others and we roared down the platform in formation. I read the first sign and to my horror it was in Indian vernacular characters. At the other end the station's name was written in English and we were saved. Being lost in the air is a horrible sensation, particularly when you have lost others by your stupidity. We got in all right—but I was shaken.



INDIA'S FRONT LINE DEFENCES, 1939-1942

Wapitis of the Indian Air Force flying over Juhu Aerodrome, Bombay, February, 1941. The average age of the aircraft in the photograph when it was taken was 12 years.



COCHIN AERODROME IN MARCH, 1942

Every effort was made at the last minute to lengthen the runways for modern fighters and bombers. This picture was taken a few days before the Japs attacked Ceylon, 200 miles away. The runways at this time were only 800 yards long. A Fleet Air Arm Fulmar fighter can be seen in the background.

Risalpur had done its work as an F.T.S., 27 Squadron flew away to Malaya in their Blenheims, glad to be rid of us, and on 1st November I reported to Gordon Lancaster at the beautiful palm-fringed airfield of Juhu, fifteen miles north of Bombay. I was given a Wapiti to myself—K. 1394, born 1930, and still going strong—I was about to fly coastal recces from my own port. I was happy and proud, but within a fortnight I had broken my aircraft beyond repair and nearly done the same to myself.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST COMMAND

ALTHOUGH DURING THE whole of our training we understood ourselves to be part of Wing-Commander Bussell's plan and this plan provided for our serving in India, we never ceased hoping we should be sent overseas to modern squadrons, preferably in the Middle East. Some were lucky; but I was not among them, and at the end of the course I was posted to Bombay, where I had previously been in business. I should have been churlish to complain.

Reay Geddes, who had raised our flight, never took command of it. He was posted direct from the F.T.S. to be chief ground instructor at the new Initial Training Wing for the I.A.F. at Lahore.

When I arrived at Juhu, the little airfield which served Bombay as an airport, I found Gordon Lancaster sitting on a packing-case surrounded by half-constructed buildings, wrestling with the flight accounts. Even ten days' existence had put them into a tangle.

Gordon Lancaster was a big, efficient engineer whom I had known in Bombay before the war. Unlike most of us he had done his training in Iraq at Hab-baniyah. He welcomed me warmly, introduced me to Flt.-Lt. 'Bulbul' Khan, an Indian, and our regular adjutant from No. 1 Squadron I.A.F., and the rest of the flight, which consisted of three pilots, three navigators, and three Wapitis. Within a fortnight I had reduced the strength in all items by one. But before that we had plenty of fun, enough to convince me that there might be compensations for not having gone to the Middle East.

Our job was to make ourselves efficient enough at general reconnaissance off Bombay to release the regular flight of 60 Squadron which had been doing this work for nearly a year. They were equipped with the early type of Blenheim. The other flights of our Coast Defence Wing, which was now settling in around the long coastline of India, were to do likewise and so relieve the scattered detachments of 60 Squadron for more urgent work. Our H.Q. was in Bombay and our C.O. was Wing-Commander Dick Ubee, one of the most charming and inspiring leaders of the R.A.F.

So here was a challenge. We literally taught ourselves the theory of our job and learnt the practice from the three pilots of Y Flight. Our most intelligent and industrious officer was Robey Johnson. He was a schoolmaster by profession and his course of G.R. procedure in among the packing-cases and construction work of our camp was a model of its kind.

Robey, or Johnny as he was usually called, had been caught in the Himalayas

at the outbreak of war on an international climbing expedition which included German and Austrian students. Their melancholy return to the plains of India had brought his companions into a concentration camp and himself to Risalpur. Throughout our course, for some queer reason, he had remained in the ranks as an L.A.C. He was a brilliant navigator and many were the flights over the sea which we were to do together in the next few months.

Our keenness to relieve Smithy, 'Chokra' Kentish, and Dobby of Y Flight had nothing to do with them personally. They gave us every help. I think they wanted to rejoin their squadron and go to war as much as we wanted to be rid of them. So on every occasion we went out with them in the Blenheims, especially Johnny—who was the best navigator in both Flights.

One night we had an exercise which developed into something of a competition between the amateurs and the professionals. A naval escort vessel was steaming about forty miles offshore and had intercepted an 'enemy raider' whose part was being played by another naval ship. We were to find the 'enemy' vessel and radio its position to the shore. In the darkness over the sea this seemed hardly likely considering how green we were, particularly as the Blenheims of the regulars were taking part in our exercise.

There was no moon. Gordon had decided to take Johnny and had given me our diminutive Indian navigator, little Atmaram. We took off before the Blenheims and set out into the pitch blackness over the sea. I could just see Gordon's navigation lights ahead of me. It was only an exercise but it was exciting enough as we went on and on into the darkness. Occasionally I looked over the side, but it was impossible to identify the sea in the cloak of blackness which seemed to shroud everything outside the cockpit. After what felt an age—it was barely more than half an hour—Atmaram, who could only just see over the edge of the back cockpit, he was so small, tugged excitedly at my shoulder and pointed downwards into the blackness. He had seen a ship unlighted and shapeless below us. What's more it was undoubtedly the 'enemy'. The friendly vessel was to show one dim light by which we might recognize her. This dark outline was fully blacked out. By chance we had stumbled on the 'enemy' without having gone through the preliminary stages of the exercise. By a fluke the gentlemen had beaten the players.

We had many maintenance difficulties, which was inevitable with aircraft more than a decade old. Our main troubles were the iron tail skid-shoes which wore out on the asphalt runways faster than we could replace them. Rather than send them five hundred miles to the depot at Karachi, we used to get them repaired by Gordon's firm in Bombay. But even this took time and we tried to spare them by landing as much as possible on the grass beside the runways.

One morning before dawn Johnny and I took off for a routine dawn patrol of the approaches to the harbour. This meant a flight of fifty or sixty miles seaward. We carried, as usual, two 250-lb. bombs and sea-markers. We took off on the runway in darkness. After three hours of uneventful patrol we came back to Juhu. The aerodrome looked normal. It was broad daylight. To spare the tailskid I decided to land by the side of the runway. Just as I was holding off and as the wheels were skimming the ground I saw pools of water all over the field. They had been invisible from the air; and now I couldn't take off again for we had landed on three points and bang, wallop, over we went, head over heels into the mud.

As we sailed over and I saw the ground coming up to meet me, all thought of the bombs had vanished. Fortunately I had clean forgotten them, and for

the few odd minutes in which we were trapped with our heads in the mud no thought of them came to me or I might have been more uncomfortable than I was. As it was, Johnny managed to get out of the back unhurt, while I had to wait for Gordon to lift the tail of the aircraft before I could be hauled out with nothing worse than a broken arm. I still forgot all about the bombs until they showed me a photograph afterwards. They had tumbled off harmlessly into the mud.

Our great joy was the garden. Dobby, the fair-haired, sunburnt Australian—who a year later was killed by the Japs at their first landings in Kota Baru—had started it by planting two Christmas trees on the lawn in front of our tiny officers' mess. He also put down a diminutive lawn and grew a creeper of convolvulus over the grey wall of our quarters. It was not very professional, but it was a start. Gordon brought the professional touch and I supplied the amateur enthusiasm. But none of this would have produced a garden without the fanaticism of our *mali*, who was overjoyed at such unexpected interest and turned every anna we gave him into green lawns and colourful beds of flowers. When Gordon left unexpectedly in January, '41, a few weeks after I was back from hospital, I took over the Flight, and promised him the garden would have first priority after operations and training. By the time I left in September every yard of ground in our camp had been reclaimed from wasteland and was either a cool green lawn or a bed of flowers. The airmen, both British and Indian, affected to be indifferent to the gradual civilizing of their surroundings, but I know it made their lives better and more congenial, even if they did remain self-consciously unaware of the changing atmosphere.

The Indian Other Ranks, of whom we had a large majority in the Flight, were pleasantly and reasonably promising youngsters. I watched them with a lot of interest for many reasons, but chiefly, I suppose, because our lives to some extent depended on their work. Their pay was low, although mechanics in an air force must be intelligent men and the I.A.F. could not afford to be an exception. Yet in the manner of India the educated youth of Matriculation standard—the minimum required for a mechanic in the I.A.F.—wanted to be officers and regarded service in the ranks as degrading. Fortunately these early troubles were soon overcome, but not before many of us had realized the importance of distinguishing between skilled mechanics and the comparatively unskilled infantry sepoy. There were so many nationalist politicians whose skilful propaganda told them ceaselessly where, in their opinion, the path of duty lay, that it seemed so important their status and conditions should be of the very best possible.

In this early difficult period they one and all stuck it out and were soon rewarded by immeasurably improved standard of pay and rations. For that reason I have always admired Indians who chose the hard way, whether they were officers in the smart cavalry regiments or the young fitters and armourers in my flight.

The time passed quickly. We became more and more immersed in our little world of the hangars, the garden and the palm trees fringing the beach. It was hard to keep pace with the outside world. Wavell had swept up Graziani's lazy host in Libya and then retreated from Benghazi. I put in an application to go to the Middle East, but nothing came of it. By this time Dick Ubee had gone to command a transport squadron, and Wing-Commander John Ker took his place. He looked very young, and had been up at Oxford at the same time as I had been at Cambridge.

It was at this time, in the Spring of 1941, that General Auchinleck came

to Bombay to inspect army units. He came by air and landed at Juhu. It was surprising to see Ivor Jehu in his retinue. He was then only a Lieutenant-Colonel. Later he became a Brigadier. Before the war, when he was a journalist on the staff of the *Times of India*, he had been a trooper in the Bombay Light Horse and Victor Noel Paton, the C.O., had been trying for a long time to get 3 rupees out of him for a Light Horse topee which Ivor had not turned in when he left Bombay. Perhaps it was because Victor used to address the letters and reminders to Trooper Jehu. As the Auk inspected the Light Horse on this occasion Victor laughingly referred to this delinquency of an ex-trooper "now on your staff, sir." "Who would that be?" asked the Auk. "Trooper Jehu, sir." The Auk laughed and Ivor paid up.

Ivor Jehu had always written strong leaders in the *Times of India*, especially since the outbreak of war, urging the Government of India to tell the people what their war-time plans for the Indian Army were. Eventually Ivor was made Director of Public Relations and the Indian Army was publicized all over the world.

The Auk quickly won the confidence of even the most rabid nationalist politicians in the Assembly. He understood Indians and knew that they really wanted to be consulted and to be treated in a friendly way. So there were tea parties for the legislators at his house, with tanks on the lawn and guns demonstrated by their own Indian soldiers.

Sir Gopalaswami Iyengar, when he was prime minister of Kashmir State, told me a delightful story which he had from his son, who worked on the *Hindu*, the famous south Indian nationalist paper. The Auk was staying at Government House, Madras. One morning he walked down the drive, out of the gates, and called in at the office of the *Hindu* to see Mr. Srinivasan, the much-respected editor. The Auk had sat down in the waiting-room with numerous callers to await his turn for an interview, when he was discovered by the young Iyengar. This gesture from the Commander-in-Chief had an unbelievable effect on Indian opinion. Within weeks of his appointment the army, from having been regarded by political India as a mercenary and satanic institution, was talked of with something approaching affection. This new enthusiasm waned when Wavell came; he was silent and stolid, and nobody in India knew much about him. But Ivor was still in charge of the publicity and everybody in the country knew all about the army and its doings, particularly the Fourth Division in Egypt and Fifth in Eritrea, where the handsome, tragic figure of the Duke of Aosta had just surrendered at Amba Alagi.

Our flying went on strenuously but unexcitingly with a full quota of convoy escorts and a mass of exercises. We had been joined by a flight of Audax from 20 Squadron. They were regulars, and the idea was that in the event of an Italian raider coming near the port we should do the reconnaissance and they would carry out the strike against the enemy. They practised dive-bombing assiduously and became remarkably accurate, but we never had any excitement. Only interminable exercises. Once the Navy told us to look for one of their sloops which was coming to India from Africa and we were to imagine she was enemy—it was always imagining for us. Bulbul Khan and Atmaram took one sector, Johnny and I took the other. We each carried out an extended Y sweep, a mathematical affair which must eventually bring you within visibility of your quarry, or so the text-book says.

We planned our search deep and at the farthest point, we reckoned a hundred miles from the shore, we found our prey, but of course the excitement was, as usual, tempered by the make-believe. And then Johnny couldn't

make our ancient wireless work, so we couldn't get off our 'enemy' report and bring the four Audax to the scene for their attack as we had planned. The return journey was a bit harassing, as for once Johnny's navigation was out, and for some time after his E.T.A., when we should have seen land, there was nothing but the sea all round and the sun sinking in the west. I turned due east, flew below a bank of gathering cloud and hit the coast far to the south of Bombay. Then our maps blew away in the rain. We landed after dark without a great deal of petrol. The wind had changed and blown us to a point one hundred and thirty miles away from the coast, the farthest I had been in a single-engined aircraft.

In June I went to Kashmir for a holiday with Mervyn Thomas, who was flying as an observer in the Calcutta Flight. On the way back I stopped for a day at Lahore, the capital of the Punjab, to visit Reay Geddes and see his Initial Training School, where the young Indians who joined the I.S.F. as pilots were given a preliminary course of physical and mental toughening up before they started to learn about flying.

I found Reay working in very beautiful surroundings, the Headquarters of the Punjab Boy Scouts. The Chief Commissioner of Scouts, Mr. Hogg,* had spent a lifetime of social service in the province and had built up the most flourishing scout organization in India. The Chief Justice, Sir Douglas Young, was the patron of the association and had collected so much money out of the bigwigs of the Province that Hogg was able to build a fine park with swimming-pools, gymnasium, and playing-grounds, at Walton, just outside Lahore. Wing-Commander Bussell had seen the possibilities of this surprisingly up-to-date lay-out and Hogg, whose life had been devoted to Indian youth, was keen to dovetail his lifework into the war effort.

So when I arrived to spend the day, there were forty or fifty amazingly fit looking youngsters marching up and down the lawns in Air Force cadets' uniform being bawled at by the Davies Cup tennis player, Flight-Lieutenant Laurie Shaffi. In front of the office block floated the Air Force flag, and in his office the Scout Commissioner was wearing the insignia of a Squadron Leader. It was a natural and spontaneous change-over from the Boy Scout camp to the cadet school. I was everywhere impressed by Reay's efficiency and Hogg's enthusiasm. In every corner there was a new building going up to house the increased numbers who were flocking to join the I.A.F. Later, that stream was to slow down alarmingly, but now all was bustle and progress.

Hogg wanted to know how the Indian pilots were shaping in the squadrons, and I told him that so far I had only experience of those who had been trained at Risalpur with me, and they were good, reliable, and experienced. I could say nothing about those who were going through the more elaborate system which was now being devised on English lines and which took longer to push them through the various stages of training. Also, I didn't know what type of young man was coming in now that recruiting was on a larger scale. Our batch had been hand-picked and were all first class by any standards. Hogg was enthusiastic. I watched them as they dived one by one from the high board into the pool. They certainly looked all right.

I had been back with the Flight a month during which Johnny and I, again with the help of my firm, had built an operations room in our store-house.

One week-end I went up to Poona to spend the Parsee New Year with

* See Note 4.

J. J.* I had known him at Cambridge, and now his father was dead he had become the leader of the Parsee community. The family house in Poona was Victorian in atmosphere, as only Parsee homes can be.

In the midst of mahogany sideboards, antimacassars, and oleographs of the Scottish lakes we enjoyed the Pattetti festival and celebrated the accession of Yezdarjird to the throne of Persia. J. J. and his sophisticated friends all felt a bit self-conscious, I think, dressed up in their fresh linen coats and the curious-shaped hat like the hoof of a cow. They all went to the Fire Temple. Later in the morning, when we were sitting at the Turf Club drinking cocktails, they looked more comfortable.

The Parsees are few in number, not more than a hundred thousand in all India, and most of those are living in Bombay and on the west coast. The great men lived mostly in the last generation and they were giants, lifting the influence of their tiny community far beyond the scope of their numbers. Their business enterprise stretched from the groaning warehouses of Shanghai to the quaysides of Zanzibar. They built ships and traded in everything under the eastern sun. They were good to their children and their poor relations. They poured their surplus wealth back into hospitals and schools for the greater happiness of their community. To-day, with a few exceptions, their sons are not following their father's example in public service. I hope they will play their part in the new India, for they are kind and clever people.

We were drinking cocktails in the Turf Club after the races. J. J.'s horse had won and we were celebrating. Sir Homi Mehta, a sixty-year-old Parsee millionaire, had got me in a grip of steel and was demonstrating his immense physical strength—he could throw any of his sons. A telegram was handed to me in the middle of this hectic scene and I put it underneath a champagne cocktail, where it got sopping wet, and returned to the wrestling bout with Sir Homi. Later, I read the barely decipherable wire.

Return at once stop posted as Chief Ground Instructor Initial Training Wing Lahore sending aircraft fetch you Monday first light.

I just had time to order a dozen gold Mohur trees and some jacarandas from Pocha, the seed merchant, before Tony Nelson, my new adjutant, arrived in one of our Harts to fly me over the hills and far away from the Bombay and the Deccan that I loved, and to a ground job.

It was an unusual take-off. First the baby trees were put in the back, then my golf clubs and finally myself—in grey flannels.

CHAPTER V

GROUNDED

I USED TO live in a tent on the lawn, the main lawn where, before the war, boy scouts used to sit round their camp fire. Whenever the grass was flooded by Mr. Hardyal Singh and the boy scout officials, my tent was marooned. There was something in the ground which made it hard and the water only soaked in very slowly—if at all.

* See Note 5,

As time went on I began to realize that many of the young Indians who came there, and into whom we tried to pour the water of our western ways for this western business of flying, were like that lawn. We tried in six weeks to make of them disciplined bodies ready for a course of flying. But I think we failed and shall go on failing. Pliant on top, like the blades of grass outside my tent, underneath was the way of life of many centuries and it was as hardened in their subconsciousness as the ground. And in a short time the sun had dried it up.

They arrived at the beginning of each succeeding six weeks' period, in the various clothes of the many provinces of the land; they went at the end of that time more changed outwardly than any body of Westerners would be, smart and happy with a new enthusiasm and in several a new ideal.

In a few days Laurie Shaffi, who was half Indian and had in consequence an understanding denied to us, was marching them about the grounds like guardsmen, mixing harshness with sudden flashes of sympathy which won their hearts. Their bodies were toned up with P.T. and Prof. Stockwell taught them mathematics with acid brilliance. In the background was the stocky Scottish missionary whose dream, come true, was these buildings and the lawns where the water was dried up by the sun.

At the beginning of each course Hogg would address the new cadets in his scout hall. It was a stirring address, spoken in a broad Scottish accent and full of sentiments which recalled speech days at one's prep. school. But they were moving, even after you had heard them several times.

We had to weed out about fifteen per cent each course. They had been so badly let down by the State system of education that it was impossible to find any foundation on which to build. The rest got through, but even so I was uneasy. We knew that many of those we passed through were dropped in the flying schools and that many of those who were not dropped were unhappy at the rougher treatment meted out to them in most flying schools. I blamed part of that on unsympathetic instructors, but the root of the problem did not lie with any Englishman: it was inherent in Indian history and character. In India there had always been a tradition of giving-in to children. It was this perversion of the natural kindness of all peoples for their children which in India had exercised a particularly evil influence on the social structure. Children were pampered and coddled from their earliest infancy and were only taught the restraint and self-discipline which is imposed on most Western children, both rich and poor, in rare instances.

Then, in the strain and stress of a war which by this time had flared up with dramatic suddenness on India's Eastern frontier, and which it was becoming only too painfully obvious was to be largely decided in the air, the bureaucrats and legislators strove to turn the youth of the country into pilots capable of fighting back the Japanese in less than six months of training. This improvisation imposed a strain on the youth of India which, through no fault of its own, it was incapable of bearing at this particular moment.

Early in December I heard by chance that Squadron-Leader Jumbo Mazumdar was flying through Lahore on his way to Burma to fight the Japanese, with the whole of No. 1 Squadron, that single Squadron which for six vital years before the war was the Indian Air Force. I caught him refuelling on the tarmac and asked him to fly low over Walton as a sign to the cadets that someone was interested in them. There was an enthusiasm when those nine aircraft roared over the big lawn which did me good for a little while.

One afternoon in December I was out in the playing-fields teaching the

cadets to play rugby. It is a pity that in India the ground is so hard, as rugby would do much to toughen up the Indian schoolboy and help rid him of that traditional abhorrence of violence which is one of the greatest stumbling-blocks to Hindu self-assurance. These boys were picking it up well. A lanky Sikh had run through the rest of them with that corkscrew motion which reminded me vividly of John Tallent. We had stopped for a breather and were passing the ball to each other round a circle as rugby players do, when I saw Hogg's square figure in blue approaching across the playing-fields from the direction of the school. He looked solemn and beckoned to me. I left the circle of smiling, sweating boys.

"The *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* have been sunk," he said quietly. "I have just heard it on the wireless."

I felt horribly naked, as if suddenly there was nothing between Lahore and Singapore, nothing to stop the rush of those savage little men.

I looked at the young Indians throwing the ball at each other. The Navy hadn't stood up to them, had been bowled over in a couple of minutes. What hope had we got in India? What hope had these young men got? It was no longer academic, a debating point in arguments with political Indians—what would you do without the British Fleet? There was no British Fleet. The shield of a hundred and fifty years had gone. But it wasn't really for India that I felt afraid, but for all of us and for myself. It couldn't be true.

I returned to the circle and we went on throwing the rugby ball, but even so, I felt more afraid than I had done since the beginning of the war.

.

Just as I was beginning to feel really irked with a ground job, I had a stroke of luck. Donald Garner, tall and gay, arrived from hospital as an instructor. He had been wounded in the armpit during the astonishing siege of the airfield at Habbaniyah in Iraq in May, 1941, when the Iraqi army had declared for the Axis. He had been grounded while the five bullet wounds in his arm healed up. During the cold nights of a Lahore winter we shared a modern cottage in the grounds of Walton and he told me that curious tale. I had little difficulty in arranging for him to take on my job.

He had been an instructor at the F.T.S. which is near the lake where the B.O.A.C. flying-boats land. Above the aerodrome, stretching from the lake southwards is the escarpment, a flat table-top of sand about a hundred feet high dominating the camp.

The camp was a big place, one of the most modern the R.A.F. had built outside England. Round it was a wire fence and the whole place was guarded by a company of Assyrian levies. Iraq had been friendly since we had brought it into existence after the last war. Then came the new German war and many Iraqis had been attracted to Nazi ideas. The first hint of trouble at the airfield was the sudden appearance of a large part of the Iraqi army with its artillery on the plateau. After this the political situation was followed by the R.A.F. with some interest, and the assurances of the Government that the troops were only on manoeuvres had been difficult to reconcile with their actions. They drew up in aggressive-looking formations on the escarpment with their forty-eight field pieces pointing at the airfield. The only aircraft at the school were out-of-date Audax and Hart trainers with one Vickers gun firing forward and one aft. There were only instructors and pupils and the Assyrian levies.

After what seemed a lot of futile political parleying in Baghdad the expected happened. Rashid Ali el Gailani, an Iraqi politician who had been in touch

with the Germans, pulled off a *coup d'état* with the army and air force behind him. The guns on the plateau began to plonk shells into the officers' mess and the R.A.F. started out on one of the most dramatic actions of the war.

The instructors and some of the pupils flew their old Audax, about twenty of them, away from the exposed airfield to the polo ground which was out of range of the Iraqi guns. From this small field they took off loaded with eight twenty-pounders under the lower wing and dive-bombed the gun positions until they had knocked them all out except one. They did this against intense machine-gun fire. Donald carried on at this game until he came too low on one of the positions, and as he was pulling out of his dive and had seen seven of his bombs land amongst the gun crew, a machine-gun got in a lucky burst and five bullets went into his throttle arm near the shoulder.

Fortunately he had only a few miles to fly to reach the polo ground; his rear gunner was able to hold him up in the cockpit. They landed at high speed between two trees with their eighth bomb, a hang-up, still on the rack. Donald fainted as they landed and the aircraft spun round like a top, but came to no harm. The bomb stayed on the aircraft.

As a result of this fine piece of improvisation the Iraqi artillery was finished, but the twenty thousand troops were still on the plateau. Moreover, German aircraft from Syria were coming through in some strength. M.E. 110's and Heinkel 111's had been seen flying in the direction of Baghdad. They were landing to refuel at Kirkuk. The shadow of the Nazi *Drang nach Osten* was racing ahead of his armies in Greece and Crete. And we had nothing but a flying school barring his way to India and the Far East.

Every sort of transport aircraft was rushed from Karachi to Habbaniyah to evacuate women and children and to bring in those few troops who could be spared—the King's Own—and who, with the R.A.F., overcame the Iraqis in a few weeks. The long shadow of Hitler, which had stretched out across the desert and the pipe-line so menacingly, retreated into Syria as quickly as it came. It never fell across Transjordan again, but the wrecked Messerschmidts in the land of the two rivers were a reminder of another close shave in a vital part of our war system.

In the cold Lahore nights Donald embellished this epic story with vignettes of the siege—one so impudent and the other so astonishing—that they bear repeating. There were two ornamental cannon which had adorned the outside of the Officers' Mess at Habbaniyah since the last war. A Flight-Sergeant Armourer set to work on them and some old ammunition was sent from Baghdad. With the besieged garrison standing round them breathless, these two cannon fired off their 'whiff of grapeshot' at the plateau and lifted the morale of the camp sky high, for it was their only artillery.

The other story concerned a wireless operator, whose pilot was killed attacking the plateau, and who flew the aircraft back to the polo ground. He made three attempts to land, succeeded at the third attempt and jumped from the aircraft to the ground, where he took to his legs and hid for three days in the camp. It took all that time to find him in order to decorate him for gallantry.

Life at Walton continued to its round of bugle calls. There were lectures and parades and games with the cadets. It was a pleasure to see the way in which these young Sikhs, Madrassis, Mahomedans, Hindus, Rajputs, Parsees, and Pathans turned rapidly from sloppy students into hard athletes inside six weeks. But they still went about in their clan groups however hard we tried

to separate them. And what they wanted was three years in an air force cadet school from sixteen onwards. The great weakness of India, as I saw it, was the lack of discipline in the home, both among the rich and the poor. These lads at Walton picked up the discipline quickly, but it was too much to expect that it would stick for long or survive against the reproachful sentimentality of their families once they should be received back in its ample bosom. Thus, they would get married as soon as they joined their squadrons and the edge at once came off their verve. I had seen enough at Walton to realize that it was a splendid idea, but it was not coming off. It couldn't come off in war-time. In plain words it was not possible to build a soundly organized air force for India in war-time when speed in recruiting and learning was essential. The sentimentality and weakness of Indian family life, coupled with the poor educational system, made it vitally necessary for the services to take over the responsibilities of the State. Until this was done there would be no really sturdy air force for India. Two years later I had an opportunity to tell Mr. Amery as much.

My efforts to get back to flying were at last successful. I had implored Dick Ubee to take me into 31 Squadron, which was now being equipped with Douglas D.C.3's and, having helped evacuate women and children from Habbaniyah, was soon to carry the remnants of our refugees from Myitkyina and northern Burma into India. But Fate had evidently made up its mind against my serving with a regular R.A.F. squadron, and Wing-Commander John Ker hauled me back into the Coast Defence Wing, where he promised to find better aircraft by taking over a fleet of worn-out air-liners from Tatas* and convert them to G.R. aircraft. I was to have command of 5 Flight at Cochin with two four-engined D.H. 86's. This last-minute conversion of outmoded air-liners to front-line aircraft in the fateful winter of 1941 is eloquent of the straits to which we were reduced, and makes the *débâcle* in Malaya as much an aerial as a naval disaster, a little easier to comprehend.

CHAPTER VI

THE FLAP

"It's A GOOD fly to Cochin," John Ker had said the night before I took off to take over my new command, and he had been right.

It was the first of many similar trips down that enchanted coast which I had done so often in times of peace by sea. From the air, with its all-embracing perspectives, it seemed even more beautiful than I remembered from the decks of the firm's little coastal steamers.

The Monster still wasn't ready, so I took off in an aged Wapiti with A.C.2 Augustine, my mechanic, in the back. As we floated steadily over the crumbling walls of Portuguese dominion—Ratnagiri, Hernai, Vengurla—I thought of Eric Gedye's book, *Fallen Bastions*. It had nothing to do with this peaceful scene below, but his title was an apt description of this Malabar coast.

The winter morning was as clear and sparkling as those of Risalpur, and

* See Note 6.

from five thousand feet the view of cliffs and bays, of rivers winding inland into the Shivaji mountains, of lighthouses and mouldering forts was unending. Once, far inland, I thought I saw the towering mass of Raigahr.

At Vengurla we swung due east inland and watched the jungles climb up towards us as we slid over the great Deccan plateau. I landed to refuel in a small field outside Belgaum where Denis Mulloch of Burmah Shell was waiting. He had lit a fire, otherwise I should have missed the landing-ground. Denis had sat next to me in the Bombay Assembly before the war. He had been shot at by a terrorist in Calcutta during the bad days, but had remained a sympathetic and liberal Englishman.

We anxiously discussed the situation in Malaya, which was going from bad to worse. He was talking of evacuating his family from India. It was clear that Singapore would fall, and unless we had pretty considerable reinforcements in the air I didn't see how Ceylon could be held—and if Ceylon with its potential airfields went, it would not be long before India began to feel the draught. "You might get some fun down Cochin way," Denis remarked to me as I climbed into the cockpit. We did—it was to become very interesting.

Denis' fire dwindled into the distance and we flew on over the dense jungles of Kanara, heading again for the coast. To the right I could just see the spires of Tropic Rome, that amazing monument of Portuguese adventure. Goa, once the greatest port in the known world after Constantinople—so had Tavernier, the famous seventeenth-century jeweller, described it. Now the jungle had entwined its baroque towers and cloisters in a grip of death. Little remained alive save the church of Bom Jesus where St. Francis Xavier was buried and where every ten years devout Catholics came in their tens of thousands to peep into the shrivelled bier. Farther down we struck the coast again just above the golden sands of Karwar where Denis Kinkaid, one of the most promising English writers about India, had been drowned in the monsoon swell.

I landed again at a picturesque little place called Cannanore, just south of a curiously shaped hill, Mount Dilli, which Murray* told me had been the first landmark seen by Vasco da Gama as he approached the Indian coast.

Cannanore is like a lifesize print of an East India trading-post. The minute landing-ground is perched on the cliff and two John Company cannon point defiantly, but uselessly, seawards. I thought of the headlong rush of the Japs down the Malay peninsular, which nothing seemed to stem. Here it was so peaceful with the surf breaking below on the golden sand—but I suppose it had been just as peaceful at Kota Baru and Penang a few weeks ago.

After a swim which reminded me of far-off summer days in Cornwall, young Augustine, a handsome boy, whose ancestors had served the Portuguese fidalgos on this very coast, cranked up the old Jupiter and we sped off in the lengthening shadows down the palm-fringed shore. Soon the lagoons and mangrove swamps of Cochin slid beneath us and I saw for the first time those beautiful backwater craft with curving wicker roofs and tattered sails which the Malabar boatmen propel slowly up and down their secluded waterways.

And then I saw Cochin, my new domain, where I would have to live and fly and work for I knew not how long. It was an exciting moment and it looked an exciting place. There was the aerodrome, four red runways criss-crossing the flat island in the middle of the lagoon. Along one side of it lay some merchant ships at anchor, and through the harbour and lagoons dashed a multitude of launches and small naval craft. In the calm of evening it looked

* See Note 7.

an inviting place. We landed, gliding in over the water, and I drew up in front of the five bedraggled-looking canvas hangars which contained the assembled might of 5 Flight, I.A.F.V.R. In actual fact it didn't at that moment as they were all out looking for a river steamer which was coasting from Burma to the Euphrates and had got lost off Cape Comorin. When Ronnie Knot, from whom I was taking over, came into my room at the Malabar Hotel late that night he had found it in the darkness and put it on its course. Without compass and guns these flat-bottomed paddle-boats were edging their way round the coastline of the Indian Ocean to bring help to the 10th Army in Iraq—for there was a flap there too, a mighty one, with the Germans driving towards Batum and Baku. Several of these helpless craft had been caught by the Jap submarines which were beginning to infest these waters; often we came on their smoking hulks too late to be of help.

.

Ronnie had only brought the flight down from Karachi a few weeks earlier so it was like starting from scratch. In actual fact David Small, who had worked for the famous merchant firm in Cochin, Pierce Leslie & Co., had pitched the tents and flown the first sortie, but he had been called away to command a new flight at Vizagapatam on the east coast and was soon to have the outstanding adventure of the Wing.

We were engaged in that process, which seems to happen so often in the R.A.F., of taking and handing over, sitting in Ronnie's office, a tent by the side of the runway.

"They must be in a hell of a flap at Delhi," said Ronnie. "Ever since we arrived we've been trying to get sanction through H.Q. at Bombay to spend a little money on gun-pits for the airfield, but without success. Here's a letter giving us more or less a free hand provided we get something done on the spot."

I looked at that long letter from Delhi. It was a good letter, written by a man who knew what he was about. It concerned aerodrome defence and talked about those airfields in Malaya which had been captured by the enemy because we had never thought of defending them and because airmen imagined they were tradesmen—fitters, riggers, and parachute packers, yes, and pilots, too, so they didn't have to fight when their aerodrome was attacked. That was the army's job, and if the soldiers weren't there or were unable to hold it, that was too bad.

This letter, besides telling us to train our airmen to fight on the ground, also told us how to site our gun-pits, and at the end of it said: "Get on with the job and report what you have done in fourteen days." That was something like it. So we went and saw Mr. Milne, the friendly Scottish engineer who had helped build the harbour and the port. Next day his men were digging gun-pits and an Australian captain, who was in port with a convoy of diggers homeward bound from the Middle East, showed us how to site the pits for mutual support. He had been dive-bombed by Stukas for three days at Retimo in Crete. He knew what it was all about, more so even than the writer of that letter in Delhi.

"You must have mutual support for each gun-pit. I recommend a triangle of three. At Heraklion our guns were strung out round the perimeter and the Jerries just picked them off one at a time. You can easily cope with several of them if you arrange mutual support by cross-fire." What he said sounded common sense, but we must have been lacking in this as well as aircraft in

Crete. We took his advice and gave him a trip in the Monster on patrol one evening.

So Ronnie went and I was left alone with a dozen young Indian pilots, one D.H. 86, five Wapitis, and Derek Wood.

Our job was the same as that of 2 Flight in Bombay but, of course, we were less experienced and, except for the Monster, we were less well equipped. The Wapiti had a range of about five hundred miles, whereas Gordon's Rapides, with their extra tanks, could do over seven hundred miles. I was determined that we should become as good as my old flight, especially as from now on we started working closely with them escorting the convoys from Bombay to Colombo and back. John Ker came down several times in his Hornet Moth with Gordon and we worked out plans for keeping up a continuous cover over the convoys down the coast. The first big one we attempted was a success. Later, I wished we could have stopped those fine ships from going on their ill-fated course; for a week after we had sped them on their way past Cape Comorin they sailed into the holocaust of Singapore. The *Empress of Asia* was set on fire in the harbour and many of the troops from the other ships walked ashore into the vile Hell of Japanese captivity.

Gordon's boys escorted them down the coast from Bombay and then a flight operated from the Belgaum field and picked them up next morning. John Ker was so keen to get this operation right and prove to the Navy and to Delhi that, despite our amateur status, or mixed personnel, and our obsolete aircraft we could do the job properly, that he came down the whole way and helped us work out the interceptions night by night.

Two Flight did well, and when I took two Wapitis and a number of B.O.R.s and I.O.R.s to Cannanore, one hundred and fifty miles north of Cochin, they had kept up an uninterrupted cover of three days from Bombay. It was something of a challenge. John Ker and Gordon had landed in the evening by the old East India cannon and we had sat up late into the night in our tent looking at the course on the Mercator charts which marked the last position of the convoy.

At dawn I sent out a Mahommedan pilot, Hassan, and young Sandhu, a Sikh navigator who had shown promise. After three hours they came back, and as we hadn't had a 'Convoy Met' signal from them I feared the worst. They had searched up and down the track of the convoy and seen no trace of it. Derek and I took off at once and did a 'creeping line ahead' search back of the original starting position.

I have done many flights over the sea in fairly large multi-engined aircraft and in flying-boats. It is different to a trip in a single-engined land-plane, particularly one that is twelve years old. I'm not trying to make out that we were heroes, for we were anything but that. All the same there is a distinct feeling of commitment when you are a hundred miles from land and there is only one large airscrew and a rather clattery engine in front of you—and all around as far as you can see the wide, empty spaces of the Indian Ocean.

This morning they were very wide and very empty. I could see Gordon and his ace-navigator, Jig-a-Jig Singh, laughing at us when we got back. Besides, more important than that was the line of bursting troopers somewhere just over our horizon waiting anxiously for their air escort. I knew how comforted they felt even with an old Wapiti—it didn't matter what aircraft was overhead, it was the eyes inside it that counted and the misgiving in the mind of the submarine commander.

We went back and forth until we had reached the prudent limit of our

endurance, and very disappointed we returned to Cannanore. John Ker was naturally upset and went off in the afternoon in one of Gordon's Rapides, searched much farther back than common sense and dead reckoning could possibly demand, and found them at tea-time. I got their position and flew my detachment back to Cochin.

Next morning before dawn Derek and I were off south down the coast. At Quilon just as the sun rose over the hills behind us we struck off seawards and flew out over the calm horizon. We were very tail heavy as we had to land back at Trivandrum, near Cape Comorin, where there would be no oil, and I had enough for the whole detachment stuffed by 'Screw' Driver, our Flight-Sergeant, into the tail of my aircraft. I had to press heavily on the stick all the time. It was very uncomfortable. I was also scared in case we should miss the convoy again, though it would be hard this time with last night's position pretty accurately pin-pointed. I strained my eyes to pick up those low shapes, but we were flying down sun and it would not be easy to pick them up.

I suppose sighting his convoy is as exciting a moment for the G.R. pilot as picking up his animal is to the deer-stalker. I shall always remember the thrill with which I sighted those dim, seemingly motionless shapes just below the horizon, ten miles ahead of us. We had hit them off this time right on the nose. Derek saw them at the same time. He pulled out the Aldis lamp from the heap of odds and ends which were piled into the uncomfortable back seat and in a moment was flashing the escort vessel. From then for three hours we did our monotonous, but I suppose important, job. Sweeping the empty waters twenty miles ahead of the little wedge of humanity in the vast spaces of sea was dull and tiring with that constant pressure on the stick. Behind, Derek was keeping his D.R. plot with a blue chinagraph pencil on his celluloid map. Afterwards, when I saw the comfortable navigator's table in the Catalina, I realized we had never done justice to our own navigators who had to keep accurate plots in that cramped, open cockpit, work our antediluvian wireless—and fire our antique Vickers gun. Sitting in the front and driving was child's play, but it was dull for the most part.

We swept low through the line of ships when our trick was over and Hassan had come out to relieve us. Thank heavens he had found it too. We wagged our wings and waved to the troops leaning on the rails, then we set course for Trivandrum, and Derek, being in good form, hit off the aerodrome without trouble.

I rang up Cochin, told John Ker and Rex Baker, the A.D.O., in guarded terms that all was well so far, and we had a grand lunch at the State hotel while the rest of the flight carried on the good work. By evening we had seen them past Cape Comorin and into the hands of the Ceylon Group. John Ker arrived in his Moth and we bathed, naked, on the beach by the airfield. We talked of the history of the coast and of what we should do after the war. On the flight home to Cochin I watched the lateen sails on the backwaters while Derek flew from the back seat. The boats looked like toys in a beautiful bath, motionless in the evening light.

It was after John Pugh arrived that the flap began in earnest. There had been signs of it ever since the fall of Singapore. It didn't take long for the bush telegraph to inform us that Ceylon was as woefully defended as India, and then, early in March, things began to happen, not very big or startling things, but they were to make all the difference, and, as it turned out they marked the turning back of the Japanese flood in the Indian Ocean.

The first we saw of it was a F.A.A. officer, Commander Kilroy, who suddenly

landed in a Fulmar fighter. It was the first modern aircraft any of us had seen and it was our first contact with the real war outside. As soon as he landed I felt an urgency in the air which hadn't been there before. He was off again in a whirl of our red dust, but within three days a ship had docked at the wharf next the airfield; we had knocked down the fence, and long boxes were being hauled from the ship to the runway, where a party of sailors unexpectedly set about prising them open and turning them into Hurricanes. Our old Wapitis looked more sheepish than ever.

Then Fleet Air Arm pilots turned up from Ceylon to test them and fly them away. Val Bailey flew me in his Fulmar at two feet along the harbour and past my window at the hotel, then soared up in a skyrocketing stall turns. It was all very new and damned exciting after our humdrum patrols and escorts. Val had been sunk in the *Ark Royal*.

It was at this time that the famous Canadian and English Catalina squadrons were rushed out from the Atlantic to guard the approaches to Ceylon. Squadron Leader Birchall arrived at Koggala Lake from England on a March evening. Next morning he took off on a long cross-over patrol in the direction of the Andamans. There was news that the Jap fleet was out from Singapore and there was a strong possibility it would head for Ceylon. Birchall had not been gone long before he flashed an enemy-sighting report which broke off in the middle. Nothing more came through but he had sent enough to galvanize the island into fevered anxiety. His interrupted message spoke of 'Battleships, aircraft-carriers, destroyers'—then silence. Their position was plotted and the course of this strong force estimated. They were not far off Ceylon. One could only surmise what had happened to the Catalina, but with carriers in such strength there can have been little hope of his survival. The great thing was he had got the vital part of his message through and in doing so had saved Ceylon and perhaps stopped the all-confident advance of the Japanese.

In the meanwhile the advance guard of fighter reinforcements from the hard-pressed Middle East had begun to trickle into India, and with long-range tanks and Hudsons to show the way they had struggled south through India to the threatened island. A famous fighter-squadron from Egypt landed off one of our aircraft-carriers and flew to the racecourse where an enlightened and energetic Group Captain had insisted on blowing up the Chief Justice's house and laying a well-camouflaged runway slap through the course. In the event this runway probably saved Ceylon; that and the Catalinas. Another boat, this time from a 413 Squadron detachment, went off to try and pick up the Japs, saw them, got off a sighting report which was cut off in the middle, and never returned. The force was definitely heading for Ceylon.

Admiral Layton, who had taken over command of the island, now ordered the many merchant ships which were taking refuge in Colombo after Singapore to get out. They strung themselves up the west coast of India, lying off the coast at intervals of a few miles like beads on a necklace. Cochin harbour was chock full.

John Ker, determined to take part in the game, was sending down a spate of signals, and Derek and I went off in the *Monster* due west in the direction of Minikoy, most northerly of the Maldivian islands, in case the Japs should be heading up the west coast of India. The Fleet Air Arm pilots were of immense help in supplementing our patrols and joined in with their Fulmars. They had confidence in our navigators and went out regularly to Kalpeni, the nearest of the Laccadive islands, two hundred miles to the west of Cochin.

Then came Easter Day. Bill Bradshaw, Flight-Lieutenant Charles Gardner

as co-pilot, set off from Koggala in Ceylon, the third Cat to look for the Japs. They were flying L for Leather, one of the Bismarck boats. They had been told to look out for Fulmars and Hurricanes from our carriers. As dawn was breaking, some two hundred miles south of the island, they saw far above them a wedge of aircraft flying high in the direction of Ceylon. They were almost on the waves, and the visibility was poor. They flew on confident in the knowledge of our own aircraft being in the vicinity.

A few minutes later, before their astonished gaze they saw break the horizon not ten miles distant the silhouettes of three mighty battleships which Charles recognized at once as the *Nagato*, the *Huso*, and the *Yamasiro*, with their escort of cruisers. So much for the sea Hurries and Fulmars—which had been, in fact, Zeros. And then the silhouettes woke up into a row of flames.

"Don't look now," said Charles to his captain, "but I think they have fired a broadside at us."

Seconds later a dozen fourteen-inch shells fell fifty yards behind them and the splash and blast nearly did for the Cat, which leapt into the air. Charles, who was driving, swerved away, and in seconds they were out of range and out of sight. The carriers must have been standing off behind the battle-wagons after releasing the attacking aircraft against Ceylon. This fact probably saved L for Leather, as the defensive screen of fighters would have made short work of them. As it was the English crew shadowed the Japs all day and lived to tell the tale, using ultra low-level tactics, invented on the spot, and which are still the basis of one new school of shadowing.

Meanwhile in Ceylon a hundred Jap aircraft, bombers and fighters, had come over without warning and had pounced on the known airfields and the docks. There were by this time only three ships in the docks, all three of which were hit and sunk, including my old friend the *A.M.C. Hector*, who had escorted so many of our convoys. The fighters at Ratmalana, the airport, were for the most part caught on the ground, but the Japs knew nothing of the racecourse. Their experience of us hitherto had not led them to believe that we should mutilate a racecourse to make a runway. In Singapore people were playing golf until the end. The Japs had every right to expect the racecourse to remain untouched and the Chief Justice to stick to his immemorial rights. Happily, at the crisis, they had misjudged us. Thirty Squadron scrambled from in front of the grandstand and fairly tore into the Japs as they twisted and turned over the harbour. One Hurricane force-landed on Galle Face green, the pilot walked into the Galle Face hotel and helped himself to a drink from the deserted bar; on the whole our losses were small. The Japs lost twenty-seven, and many damaged which could not have made the carriers. We had won the first round. Little serious damage had been done and a second Pearl Harbour had been avoided by brilliant and brave reconnaissance.

One of the pilots of 30 Squadron, Peacock-Edwards, now Squadron-Leader, told me how that historic morning seemed to him.

"We had only just flown into Ceylon from a carrier which had brought us from the Middle East," he said; "we knew nothing of the Japanese, neither their aircraft nor their tactics.

"We knew, of course, that the Jap fleet and the carriers were heading in our direction, but at eight o'clock that Sunday morning we were out on the racecourse and had no inkling that the large V-shaped formation of aircraft which was serenely flying right over our heads at about eight thousand feet was the enemy!

"Then somebody said, quite casually: 'But surely we haven't got so many



SIR RICHARD PEIRSE (*third from left*) talking to SQUADRON-LEADER MEHAR SINGH of Lyalpur, the first Indian pilot to win the D.S.O.



A GROUP OF INDIAN AIR FORCE SQUADRON COMMANDERS
Taken during a conference in Delhi. Two R.A.F. staff officers are in the group.



AN ATTACK BY BLENHEIMS ON THE JAPANESE-HELD PORT OF AKYAB IN NOVEMBER, 1942

This particular attack was carried out against the ship which can be seen at the Jetty and which later sank. The Blenheim over the target is just about to crash into the sea.

aircraft in Ceylon,' and we looked a bit closer. There must have been two lots of twenty-seven in that big formation.

"Then we suddenly realized that they were the Japs. They had flown right over us once and were now turning out to sea in the direction of Colombo harbour."

"What did you do then?" I asked.

"We scrambled furiously," he went on, "and I climbed right up after them, catching them up over the sea just as they were turning back towards the harbour.

"I went down after them and got one from behind in the middle of the dive. Then their fighters, who must have been waiting up above them, came tearing down and tracer began to fly uncomfortably close round my cockpit. I had to give up chasing the bombers and tried to fight the Navy Zeros. There wasn't much future in that, but I managed to get one of them which came straight at me and didn't seem able or willing to give way.

"Then several of them hung on to me and I was hit all over the place. So I had to come down to ground level and, with my engine gone, did a belly-landing in a paddy-field outside Colombo. Both the wings came off, but I was all right, though I didn't get out until the Zeros had cleared off."

Peacock-Edwards got his D.F.C. It was a memorable occasion in the history of the R.A.F. against the Jap air force, for it was the first time that the slower, but more hard-hitting, Hurricanes, instead of trying to dog-fight with the more manoeuvrable Zeros, got height and streaked down on top of the Japs, hit them hard from behind and dashed on down to ground level in what have since become our classic tactics against the Japanese in the air. The success of these tactics was first demonstrated on this famous Sunday morning in April, 1942.

Just in case they should have split and sent a force up in the direction of Cape Comorin, Jack Pickard, a quiet New Zealand F.A.A. pilot, flew south with Derek and myself in our Wapiti and his Fulmar to Trivandrum. We took it in turn to patrol the waters off the southern tip of India, each silently praying that we should be spared the sight of those wicked-looking carrier-hulls with their dreaded brood of Zeros. We flew our patrols all day and saw nothing. Back at the aerodrome on Willingdon island we all slept out near the aircraft. I remember feeling apprehensive and rather gloomy. The series of disasters had been so long and so heavy, unrelieved in their weight—the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, Singapore, Burma, and now this attack in strength on India where we all knew only too well our dreadful weakness. Should we be flying Wapitis and converted unarmed air-liners of pre-war vintage if there had been any strength in the country?

The Japs seemed invincible, they seemed to have acquired some kind of magic cloak. Their bombing was thrice deadly accurate; their soldiers fought by night and made the jungle their friend; their navy was obviously running circles round ours.

All night long the Malayallum temples boomed with the muffled explosions of the worshippers who in these parts like to banish evil spirits by setting off gunpowder at the temples. That night I was always waking up and imagining the gunfire from a Jap invasion fleet. It was a thick night, heavy with anticipation.

In the morning we heard the news of the battle of Colombo. Val Bailey, who flew in to fetch more of the newly-erected Hurries to replace the losses, brought us a first-hand account. In a Fulmar he had claimed one of Tojo's little Zeros. One of his friends had been shot down; the Fulmar was far too slow for those little bastards, who could turn on a sixpence, pull up into a stall,

do a roll off the top and cock ten thousand devils of a snook at you. But Val was elated that we had won; we had got on top of them, dived past them squirting hard, and beaten them by superior fire-power and speed. It was good news. From then things slowly looked up, and I have always felt that the war in the East took its turn for the better at that moment.

And so gradually the flap passed. The Japs made an abortive raid on Trincomalee, but we had more warning this time and our Hurricanes patted them again. Most of the damage was caused by the unfortunate siting of a bomb dump between the only two hangars on the airfield. It was hit by the Japs and the bangs of our own bombs bursting went on for a long time after the last enemy aircraft had gone. There was a magnificent attempt by a Blenheim squadron to bomb the Jap carriers, a forlorn but splendid gesture in the light brigade tradition. They dropped their bombs close to the enemy carriers, but ineffectively. On the way home they ran into the returning armada of Japanese fighters. Four Blenheims out of twelve got back.

On 15th April, the Catalina L for Leather was out again south of the island looking for the Jap fleet, which by now was known to have split into two forces, one having been spotted off Vizagapatam on 6th April by David Small. It had set about the stream of merchant ships fleeing from Calcutta and comprised a carrier, some cruisers, and destroyers. But on this day, Charles Gardner's birthday, he and Bill Bradshaw spotted their old friend the battleship *Nagato*, steaming on the interesting course of 290° (N.W.)—the direction of Cape Comorin and the west coast of India. What's more, a fat convoy of merchant ships had left Colombo for Bombay that morning. The wolf was after the flock, or so it seemed. Charles and Bill shadowed him all day, by now they had the technique and there were no more salvos from the fourteen-inch guns; when they had to return to Koggala at dusk the *Nagato* was still steaming in the direction of Cochin.

I had a signal from John Ker in the middle of the night giving me this startling news, and in the morning Jack Pickard and Derek Wood in a Fulmar, a young Indian navigator and myself in a Wapiti, took off for Trivandrum from where we made a series of cross-over patrols due west of the coast which should have given us a sight of the battleship, if she continued on her course of the night before. We passed over the large convoy, which Sir Ramaswamy Aiyar, the Dewan of Travancore, later told me had caused something of a panic to the Travancorians, who took it for a Jap invasion fleet. But there was no sign of the *Nagato*, and so far as I know she has not been heard of to this day.* For some reason which we may never know she altered course during the night, and, probably on orders from the Jap C.-in-C., rejoined the rest of the fleet and returned to Singapore. I often discussed this later with Charles, who said that just before they left the *Nagato* in the gathering dusk he thought he saw the battleship signalling by lamp to another vessel, possibly a cruiser, which they could not clearly distinguish. This may have been the turning point.

A week earlier David Small took up his distinguished part in the action and achieved the outstanding feat of our little Coast Defence Wing. He had just formed his flight and arrived on 1st April with two Wapitis at the field in the valley behind the small port of Vizagapatam, half-way up the east coast of India. He had no 'phone to the Naval Officer in Charge at the port, no hangars, and as yet no airman. On 6th April, after struggling with all these initial difficulties, he went out on his first patrol. He decided to navigate, as there

* See Note 8.

were no wireless operators or navigators on the spot, so a young Indian pilot called Barker, whose home is at Agra, flew the aircraft. They were not more than thirty miles off the port, barely clear of the swept channel, when David saw flashes to the north-east. He looked closer and witnessed the unbelievable sight of an aircraft carrier, several cruisers and destroyers belching fire at a merchant vessel, like hounds round a fox at bay. He went closer and realized that here was part of that mighty Jap fleet which had attacked Ceylon and had been playing hide-and-seek with the Navy for a fortnight.

He directed Barker to fly back to the coast and checked on his navigation; then he went back to the action at eight thousand feet and had a bad moment when he saw a flight of three 'yellow radial-engined low-wing fighters' fly below them in the direction of the land. But miraculously the Zeros never saw the awkward old biplane wallowing along at a hundred miles an hour. He stayed long enough to sketch the different types of Jap vessels engaged, then flew back, landed, took a taxi to the naval office eight miles away from where N.O.I.C. put through a long-distance call to Calcutta and Ceylon about a Jap naval force trailing its coat off the Coromandel coast. Later that day Vizag was bombed, but the airfield with its two Wapitis was ignored. Such was the state of our preparedness in India at that time. The Americans talk about doing things 'on a shoe-string'. We were working on a worn-out shoe-string, and by some odd chance, like the escape at Dunkirk in the west, we got away with it in the east too. But it had been rather a close affair.

.

We quickly returned to normal routine—morning, afternoon and dusk patrols of the approaches to Cochin and convoys up and down the coast. John Pugh got our defences in order. The gun-pits were weatherproof, well sited and interconnected with telephones. His R.A.F. regiment were keen and efficient and John bristled with ideas. One day General Money came to inspect us, and with some trepidation I agreed to his proposal that we should ambush the General. It seemed to be in line with the new style of warfare into which our orthodox methods and their hopeless results were forcing us. So we lay in the bushes at the entrance to the airfield instead of lining up all spruce and shiny as of old. When the General and his *aide* were held up by a five-ton lorry across the road and found themselves surrounded by a jungle-clad and highly-armed R.A.F. regiment, which marched them off to the guard-room, he was highly pleased. That was the sort of person John was.

Soon the rains came—in torrents. It was then we started to lose crews. The Wapitis were wonderful old aircraft, but they were old. The first loss was due to a plug vibrating loose in the large radial engine. Two young Indians, Aurora and Sandhu, were at the farthest point of their patrol when the engine gave out and they had to come down. Happily they were near a merchant ship, the *Silver Maple*, which did a record rescue and fished them out in five minutes. The captain had to observe wireless silence and could not tell us at the aerodrome about the rescue, with the result that Derek and I were scouring the depressingly empty wastes of the Indian Ocean in the *Monster* while the two lads we were looking for were comfortably eating their dinner in the hotel. A few days later Derek and I had a similar experience. We were escorting a convoy twenty miles offshore and I thought I saw the smoke of many ships on the horizon. I climbed to seven thousand feet and then the engine started to cough. We dropped our bombs and I tried to stretch the glide to the coast, but was pretty certain the moment had come when I should know what landing

in the sea was like. But the old Jupiter coughed and spluttered its way back to Willingdon Island, and after we had landed we found that one of the plugs had simply fallen out.

With the rain and the wind came the bad losses. Jack Pickard, the soft-spoken New Zealander, disappeared on the short stretch to Coimbatore where he was ferrying an Albacore. The clouds and rain were down to a hundred feet, and there was only one gap two miles wide at Palghat, between the Nilgiris and the Annamallie mountains, where he could squeeze through to Coimbatore. We searched by air and car for days, but there has been no trace of him or his aircraft from that day to this. A Wapiti crew with two young Indians, who had just joined the Flight, disappeared into the blinding rain which flung itself in stinging walls of tropical water for the next three months against this coastline. They were never seen again. And young Sequeira, the most promising of all the Indian pilots in the flight, who had flown one of the F.A.A. Gladiators the day before with a sure touch and lovely rhythm, dived straight into the sea trying to hit a marker with his front gun. We kept on flying through the monsoon, but with our old war horses falling to pieces it was a struggle, and one by one they crashed or fell to bits, and when General Beresford Peirse came to inspect us in August there was only one left. At that time with Donald Law's Atlantas, cast-offs from Imperial Airways, all temporarily unserviceable at Madras, it was for a while the only serviceable aircraft in South India.

By now the end of the Coast Defence flights was at hand; and I'm certain it was Charles Gardner's report to Group which started our decline and fall. That and the arrival in India of Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse, who soon set about pulling our air defences together. Charles' part in it was interesting. He brought the crew of L for Leather to Cochin for a rest while his boat was refitting at Bangalore. He had been told to give us the benefit of his experience and to improve the navigation of our crews, most of whom were Indians.

The month he spent with us was a joy to me for many reasons. He had seen so much in his Catalina that I had ached for but which our pathetic resources and paltry war in India had denied. He talked for hours of the Atlantic and his hunts for U-boats; he pieced together the vital parts of the Ceylon battle on the outer fringe of which we had played our tiny part. And above all that he had been a war correspondent for the B.B.C. in France at the beginning of the war and had made his name as a broadcaster during the Battle of Britain. We flew several times together in the Monster and he spent much time and energy on trying to improve the navigation of my Indian lads. But, without being unfair to them, there is no doubt they were not up to the R.A.F. standard, not by a long way. This was partly because they took a long time to pick things up and partly because we had not been properly trained or equipped.

At the end of the month Charles told me he thought it was not much good persevering, at any rate not with the limited training material in the Flight, and he wrote as witty and telling a report to Group as anyone would want to read. The immediate upshot was a series of navigation courses for all Indian crews in the Wing at Koggala in Ceylon at the hands of those veterans of the Catalinas, Pete Walker, Toby Hildyard, 'Jacko' Melville-Jackson, 'Sweepy' Stacy, and others. I went there for a month and went out on long patrols in the Cats, which filled me with unutterable joy. But the game for us was over.

Sir Richard Peirse quickly reviewed the situation and made plans for the I.A.F. more suited to their flair and abilities, promising the young Indians

the best single-engined aircraft which the command could then produce, Hurricanes and Vengeance dive-bombers, and—biggest change of all—the new Indian squadrons were to be all Indian, commanded by the young men who had done so well with No. 1 Squadron in the disastrous Burma campaign which had just finished at that time.

I began to look round for another job.

CHAPTER VII

A NEW AIR FORCE

THE R.A.F. FILTERED back into India during March and April, 1942, those who could fly out their battered Blenheims and the few Hurricanes which had defended Rangoon so valiantly with the A.V.G., landing them at Calcutta where 'Fiery' Lock was now C.O. Many airmen walked out through the Burma jungle along the same track as the column of European and Indian refugees, so many thousands of whom were not as lucky as those privileged few who had been flown out from Myitkyina by the Americans and our own transport squadrons.

It was in March, too, that the modern R.A.F. was born in India. Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse had been sent from England in December to take over the air war against the Japs in the Dutch East Indies under General Wavell. He had arrived in time to leave, and only just. When Wavell came back to India, Peirse came with him, bringing Air Commodore Johnny Darvall* and Air Commodore 'Bill' Williams with him. Darvall's Australian bush hat was the first to be seen on the head of an airman in India. The fashion is universal now and the topee is dead.

For some reason the specially selected pilot who was sent from Delhi to Calcutta to bring Peirse to his new H.Q. made such bad landings at Allahabad and Delhi that his aircraft was badly damaged on both occasions. It was, I think, symptomatic of that poor, tired, forgotten bit of the R.A.F. which had been struggling since the beginning of the war at the end of the supply line. Now it was unexpectedly in the middle of the limelight, with one of the big figures of the Air Force in its midst to bring order out of chaos, and to hold the triumphant enemy. The occasion was too overwhelming.

Peirse got to work in the space of hours. It must have been one of the quickest transformation scenes of the war. Only a handful of the original staff survived the holocaust, two of them were V.R.s, friends of mine from the business world, Jack Alexandroff and Charles Ralli. Peirse installed himself in a large room on the first floor of G.H.Q. and brought his staff in as well to rooms which had hastily been vacated by Government of India officials. Peirse had lost no time in making the urgency of the position clear to all, and it was slowly dawning on the bureaucrats that only a powerful and up-to-date air force could stop the Japanese from invading India. As it was, the port of Chittagong lay wide open to the enemy. The army had even withdrawn from

* See Note 9.

that port two hundred miles east of Calcutta, and the remnants of Alexander's army was straggling into India through Imphal.

Peirse had two main tasks at this critical moment. The first was to hold back the Jap air force from bombing industrial Bengal and giving support to its army which might invade the eastern provinces; secondly, he had to build up airfields, maintenance units, and bases on a modern pattern in the vast hinterland of India. The first part of the task looked difficult enough with the Japs in possession of all our airfields in Burma, including places like Magwe, just over the Arakan hills within easy bombing range of Calcutta and Jamshedpur, the big steel works. But somehow or other it was done and, what is more, the R.A.F. went on to the offensive remarkably quickly. Squadrons were re-formed, reinforcements arrived from the Middle East—although they were only Hurricanes and Blenheims—but the important thing was the offensive spirit which returned as fast as the tired and battered crews could get their breath back.

But before this offensive could develop we had to build modern airfields and bases from which to launch it. Air Vice-Marshal Collier, brilliant organizer, who knew the Russians well and understood the vast rear organization required by a modern air force, arrived in India at this time and put into operation a vast plan of airfield construction costing thirty million pounds.

He had to overcome difficulties of procedure which, inevitably, imposed dangerous delays on the programme so vital to the defence not only of India but of the whole grand strategy of the United Nations. But under the impact of Collier's drive and the ever increasing menace of the Jap onslaught in Burma, delays melted away and the Government of India P.W.D. achieved probably the high-water mark of its success in the construction of this magnificent chain of airfields.

So, from a handful of grass fields with a maximum take-off and landing-space of eight hundred yards, most of which were situated in the Peshawar vale, a network of operational and layback airfields with concrete runways two thousand yards long, and dispersal areas miles apart from one another, grew up under the magic hand of Collier and the brilliant staff of organizers which he gathered around him. One of his right-hand men was Reay Geddes.

Operations were in the hands of Bill Williams, who was acting as Peirse's S.A.S.O. Air Vice-Marshal Stephenson, famous as A.O.C. of the light bomber group which had sustained such heavy losses in the Channel in 1940 and 1941, was A.O.C. of Bengal Command, the operational command which Peirse had set up in the east to stem the tide and take over the offensive. Paddy Bandon, the cheerful Irish Earl—who had won the D.S.O. commanding a Blenheim squadron in Stevenson's group in England—had lately arrived in Delhi among the crowd of operational types who were flocking out to Peirse's staff. Some of the loveliest of war-time verses, Anthony Richardson's 'These our Children', were dedicated to Paddy Bandon.

In June, before the Japs could do much to follow up or consolidate their breath-taking gains in Burma, the monsoon broke and as someone put it, "the Jap Air Force packed up and went back to play tennis in Singapore." They certainly made no attempt to attack India or to interfere with our immense building plans. The coolie labour, without which the all-weather runways could not have been built, were left unmolested, and by October the many famous R.A.F. stations of Bengal and Assam were ready: Agartala, Feni, Chittagong, Comilla, Ramu, and a host of fair-weather strips down the Mayu peninsular where the newly-arrived Hurricane squadrons settled down to a

new type of life surrounded by the jungle, wild elephants and, not very far away, the Japanese infantry. Farther back Wellington squadrons were setting off on long-distance raids against Rangoon and the oilfields at Yenangaung in central Burma, raids which have gone on regularly ever since, probing deeper and deeper into the enemies' territory. From that first monsoon when R.A.F. crews battled their way through twenty thousand feet high cumulonimbus clouds over the Chin Hills, which separate Burma from India, to reach the dry belt of the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin on the other side, we have established an ascendancy which the Japs have never recovered. More aircraft trickled into the country, and because the Japs wouldn't, or couldn't, fly in that monsoon of 1943 they never regained the initiative which they had so ruthlessly and efficiently exploited since December, 1941, by virtue of superior numbers and superior aircraft. What interested me particularly in all this invigorating period of change was the way in which the A.O.C.-in-C. took over the problem of the I.A.F. and in the twinkling of an eye laid down a policy. For it had been a difficult problem of statesmanship and one which a succession of A.O.C.s and air staff officers of the old régime had fiddled with since 1931. Peirse realized at once that the Indian people did not know they even had an air force. In fact the only stories which ever reached their ears were rumours which came from the few young men who were in it that they were flying twelve-year-old crates which were gradually falling to pieces and crashing into the sea off the Indian shores. Tales which gained in the telling and were beginning to do a lot of harm among the parents of just those boys who we wanted so badly in the Service.

A happy event gave him the chance to focus publicity on the young Service and tell the story of its one regular squadron which had played a prominent part in the Burma campaign. Wing-Commander Jumbo Mazumdar was awarded the D.F.C. for his fine leadership in that campaign. Several correspondents who were through the retreat in Burma mentioned the I.A.F. and their antiquated 'Lizzies'—we thought they were modern by Wapiti standards—Gallacher spoke highly of them and so did Burchett, both *Daily Express* correspondents who struggled out of Burma on foot. But nobody heard just what they did, as the correspondents had not been in a position to gather any details, and many of the adventures of that fighting went untold for want of adequate reporting and communications.

What struck me as the outstanding feat of the Indian squadron in that lost campaign was the way they threw all their training overboard as soon as they realized it was inappropriate to the conditions, and turned themselves from a spotter reconnaissance squadron to a bomber unit in one day. Their Lysanders, high-wing parasol monoplanes, slow and with an excellent view, were intended for the old 1914-18 type of spotting for army batteries. The R.A.F. soon stopped using them for that purpose in France in 1940 when they were massacred in droves by the German fighters. In Burma there was mighty little spotting, too, and Jumbo, for the first time in R.A.F. history, hung two 250-lb. bombs on the tiny spats which stick out on each side of the Lizzie's under-carriage where formerly they hung small twenty-pounders. He went off on his own, skimming the tree-tops into the Shan States, and bombed a Jap airfield at Namsang with excellent results. The next day he took the whole squadron over with a New Zealand fighter escort. From then on, with brief interludes at their old task of reconnaissance flying for the army, they remained a bomber squadron, and although they were very slow and could only mount one machine-gun in the observer's cockpit, they never lost an aircraft to the

Jap fighters. Flying low over the tree-tops they were almost invisible from above.

Two Flights of the Coast Defence Wing, with crews from among my old friends trained at Risalpur, were also in this campaign. Eric Sprawson, a schoolmaster from the Chief's College at Rajkot, who later was much in the news when he baled out of his Lancaster over Normandy on D-Day and was sheltered for thirty-three days by French patriots, flew his four Wapitis and two Harts all the way from Karachi to Bassein, while Hem Chaudheri took the Calcutta Flight with their Blenheims into the Irrawaddy delta. He came down in the Bay of Bengal a hundred miles from Chittagong with John Ker. They were rescued by a Chittagonian fisherman who reluctantly took them aboard his boat, having mistaken their Blenheim for a J.U. 88. The old salt had been a lascar on a City boat in the evacuation of Greece and Crete and was an expert, so he told them, at aircraft recognition.

No. 1 Squadron flew unceasingly through the retreat, first based at Mingaladon, near Rangoon, and later at Lashio, near the Chinese frontier. They got out with the R.A.F. at the very last; and now Sir Richard Peirse closed down our tatterdemalion coast defence flights, lifted out the leaders from No. 1 Squadron and put them in command of brand-new squadrons, with Hurricanes and then the new Vengeance, to train for the return match. The judicious publicizing of these young men and their deeds roused the imagination of the Indian public in a quite remarkable way.

In the excitement of the gathering events of that summer I had read and then forgotten a paragraph in the *Madras Mail* announcing that Wing-Commander Roger Falk had been appointed Senior Public Relations Officer of the air forces in India and that he was on his way to India by air to take up this new appointment.

The last time I had seen Roger had been in London at the very beginning of the war, when he had suggested taking on my non-existent job in the Ministry of Information. He knew India well, having started a flourishing advertising business in Bombay and Calcutta in the early 30's. I had no idea that he had joined the Air Force and had been impressed with his rapid rise in rank. I remember thinking that he must have come out to work in some capacity with Ivor Jehu, another old acquaintance of pre-war days in Bombay who had worked on the *Times of India*, and had now become Indian Army Director of Public Relations. He was now a Brigadier in Delhi, and seemed to be very much at the centre of things in the publicity world. Then I had forgotten all about it in the press of what seemed vital work—the keeping serviceable of half a dozen antiquated biplanes. In the months to come I often wished I had completely forgotten that short Reuter paragraph which was to have such an influence on my war-time life.

In October, 1942, just before the coast defence Flights died, I was given command for the second time of my old Flight in Bombay. It was an unreal period, for Gordon Lancaster was still at Juhu and it was difficult to know really whether Group intended him or me to rule that little kingdom which we had shared alternately for two years and which we both loved so dearly. Then, suddenly, in that queer way in which Fate so often works, we were neither of us in charge. He was boarded home and I met Roger in the Gymkhana Club.

I saw his large back at the next table and knew with a sure instinct that if

I were to meet him it would affect my life. I hesitated—and then sent over a note. In a moment his demonstrative arms were round me and after a drink or two I had the whole story, the vivid amplification of the Reuter message.

Ivor Jehu, as I suspected, had been instrumental in bringing him to India and, although he was starting an all R.A.F. Public Relations section responsible to the Air Ministry, out here in India it came directly under Ivor's inter-services directorate; and Ivor was directly responsible to Wavell, the C.-in-C. There was a lot more detail from Roger about how he was rushing round India by air collecting personnel and how he hoped to get back to England as soon as the show was running under a capable successor. It didn't need a Christopher Columbus to see that in the rapturous reunion Roger had settled, in his own mind at any rate, that I was to be that successor. We neither of us knew quite what Ivor would say, but from Roger's point of view it was an ideal prospect which gave him a slender hope of seeing his Meg again fairly soon and of going back to his real war-time interest, the 'Org' branch of the R.A.F.—hopes which by now were growing rather thin. For me it promised a tremendous change at a time when clearly I was due for change anyway.

Roger flew to Ceylon, then back to Delhi. Ivor, rather oddly, fell in with the scheme and put up a minute to Sir Richard Peirse, who agreed that my usefulness as a pilot was on a par with that of the dead and dying Wapitis. Within a fortnight I was sitting in Sir Richard's room in Lutyens' palace into which Roger had ushered me with his enviable assurance. I had seen Sir Richard before, in that fine picture, *Target for To-night*, and it was an experience to sit opposite him and study his strong, handsome face. The interview was very short, but it had taken place so soon after my arrival in Delhi that I had barely time to collect myself and make a coherent impression. Moreover, it was at this meeting that I was given the job of drafting Sir Richard's first dispatch to the Secretary of State, Sir Archibald Sinclair.

CHAPTER VIII

A NEW IDEA

PUBLIC RELATIONS IS the outward and visible sign of a new and invisible grace on the part of the services towards the Press. Sometimes it is invisible on the outside too, so correspondents have told me. And each service has a different way of telling the world its deeds. The Navy is still silent except when it sinks an enemy battleship; the army encourages reasonable publicity from correspondents of newspapers; the R.A.F. encourages correspondents and, just in case they should miss anything, provides trained P.R.O.s to write stories for them as well. In this way the air force at one time earned unfairly the title of Royal Advertising Force. The truth is that there is more glamour in the tapered wings of one Spitfire than in a whole regiment of tanks, and that the Royal Navy, which could probably compete more effectively for the imagination of the public even than the R.A.F., still looks embarrassed when its deeds appear in print.

In India there had been no Public Relations until 1940 because the Govern-

ment of India held the view that the army was not a matter for debate in the legislature. On Budget days, once a year, the Secretary of the War Department told the Assembly how some of the money appropriated for the army had been spent.

In 1940, Ivor Jehu changed all that in his ruthless way. When the war gathered momentum in the east and India found herself in the front line, many correspondents arrived, some of them from Malaya and Burma. Leland Stowe, Philip Jordan, Eve Curie, and many others had come in on the flood-tide of our defeat in Burma, where they had been washed up on the sands at Delhi for long enough to report the Cripps Mission. Then they left for Europe and America. Their places were taken by a team of writers who became old friends. The Indian army and the British army in India at last had a publicity organization of its own which grew daily as its swashbuckling director attacked and absorbed and increased like a Harkness or a Rockefeller or a Mellon.

One day in May, Ivor and the Auk flew to Bombay. I went with them and took the opportunity to fly as second pilot in the Lockheed 12, which had been given to the R.A.F. by the Maharajah of Kashmir. The Auk was still unemployed and there was much discussion as to his future. He was going to Bombay to welcome the returning Fifth Indian Division in which was his old battalion of the 1st Punjab Regiment. He was staging an unofficial welcome for them from an old friend and former Commander-in-Chief. Major-General Briggs was in command. Ivor and I were going to see the film, *Desert Victory*, which was shortly to be shown throughout India, to ensure that there were in it enough recognizable shots of the Indian army. Ivor, with his uncanny anticipation of trouble in the nationalist Press, scented possible danger; and, as usual, he was right.

It was difficult at that time not to feel sorry for this tall, blue-eyed General who had probably saved the United Nations from the severest set-back of the war by his stand at Alamein. Many said it had been his own fault for choosing bad subordinates, but the fact remains—in the crisis he took command himself and held Rommel when the latter was telling Hitler and the world Press in Berlin with the rasping military accent of all German soldiers: "*Was wir haben das halten wir fest.*" The 25-pounders and the Sherman tanks were on the way but they were not for the Auk, and I shall always remember the moment in the Army Film Centre at Bombay when Ivor brought him to see *Desert Victory*, which could not have been fairer to him, yet which summed up the personal tragedy so strikingly when Hodson's commentary spoke that sentence: "The Prime Minister visited the Alamein line—and with him he brought new leaders." As the camera swept the sandy skyline and disclosed the unmistakable silhouettes of Churchill with Alexander and Montgomery, I watched the impassive face of Auchinleck in the darkness of the projection room. It was impossible to tell what thoughts were passing through his mind. But he is a warm and emotional man, and it must have been a sad reminder of the time when he so nearly became one of the great figures of history. I was glad that David Macdonald, one of the most delightful men in the film world, had done him justice.

We had a number of dinners and lunches at the Yacht Club and the Wilkingdon, small friendly affairs, for Ivor and I had many friends still in Bombay, and Skippy Moore brought her young son out to the airport to say good-bye to the General and to see the aeroplane. He found it hard to know which should claim the larger part of his attention. I think that young American will always be a friend of England.

We stopped for lunch at Jodhpur where Narpat Singh, H.H.'s secretary, was very friendly, and we flew over the hot plains of Rajputana in the afternoon. The Auk's magnificent Pathan bearer was very sick. I was glad to be in the pilot's cockpit. Our job in Bombay had proved to be very necessary, as the few shots of Indian troops which had been included in the film were over so quickly that they would not have registered with the average cinema-goer. In consequence of this Ivor and I had cut in a few obvious pictures without spoiling the continuity of the film. Many will cavil at this tampering with a film, but I think the action was justified by circumstances. The Fourth and Fifth Indian Divisions had fought well, and so paradoxical is the Indian mind and the Indian Press that the same person and the same paper which would castigate all Indian soldiers as mercenaries and claim to have no interest in the war, would howl in paroxysms of indignation if those troops were not adequately represented with those of the other nations in a film such as *Desert Victory*.

The funny thing was that, despite the additional feet of film cut in, which had exercised us a lot in case they should disturb the balance of the film and invite criticism of too obvious propaganda, were not enough for the nationalist Press, which screamed aloud, 'discrimination and ingratitude'. The New Zealanders, who led the Eighth Army from Alamein to Tunis, were not shown once. I often wondered if their papers had anything to say. This inconsistency is one of the most exasperating characteristics of political India, especially to her friends.

.

Just before I took over R.A.F. Public Relations from Roger, in January, 1943, the R.A.F. brought off one of its most spectacular victories of the whole war. Ever since the previous monsoon, when the Japs had given us that precious breathing-space which Peirse had used so well to lay the foundations of the new R.A.F. in India, we had been hammering away at them in Burma with Wellingtons and Blenheims and building up the defence of Calcutta, which amazingly had not yet been attacked. Jack Leather, who had been at Clare with me and had captained that wonder 1934 rugger team which beat Oxford by thirty points, was in charge of fighter tactics at Delhi. He was not happy about the night-fighter defence of the Empire's second city. How could he be, for there was none, save Hurricane day-fighters which were not too hot even in the daytime. He had no difficulty in persuading the A.O.C.-in-C. to ask for an experienced night-fighter squadron from the Air Ministry. Before the reply could arrive the Japs had come.

Throughout the Christmas week of '42 they sent over small formations of Army 99 bombers which dropped small fragmentation bombs not big enough to dent the roadways. But they dented the all-important morale of the factory workers on the Hooghly and the dock labour on whom we depended so much for unloading supply ships and for making the hundred and one articles of war which flowed from Bengal to the armies in the Middle East and Iraq. Wing-Commander O'Neill, commanding the Hurricane Squadron, got one of the night raiders, but only one.

Then at the end of Christmas week as the moon waned the Japs stopped coming over at night. But the stream of refugees continued down the Grand Trunk Road. Howrah station was like a gutter choked with demoralized humanity, and the down-trodden coolies refused to carry the *banias* tin trunks for less than five rupees apiece. Good luck to them.

With the January moon the Japs came again, but somebody else had come too, from the other direction, and in answer to Sir Richard Peirse's signal. A Beaufighter squadron, which had been night fighting over the Suez Canal and Malta with great success, sent a flight of three black monsters across the sands of the desert and the cold plains of an Indian winter to Dum Dum, Calcutta's airport. They landed on 13th January. One of the three black Beaufighters was piloted by a very young-looking flight-sergeant who lived in Aylesbury and whose name was Pring. Another was flown by an Australian sheep-farmer called Crombie. Pring's navigator was Sergeant Phillips from Plymouth. Pring had already shot down one Heinkel over the Nile Delta and two other German bombers near Malta, besides two damaged.

On 15th January, before they even knew what this sprawling city and its inhabitants were like, what language they spoke and what gods they worshipped, before they even knew what sort of aircraft the Japanese flew or what tactics they used, the alarm went. The whole Flight took off. It was a quarter to ten at night and there was a moon. Four enemy aircraft had been plotted east of Calcutta. By eleven o'clock three of them had been destroyed—all by Pring.

They had circled up into the starry sky over Dum Dum moving eastward over towards the Ganges delta. After forty minutes they got to within a hundred yards of a straggler. Leaning over the rails of a trooper waiting to enter the Suez Canal not fifty miles from where Phillips and Pring had claimed their first victim, Phillips told me in a quiet matter-of-fact voice how it had seemed to him.

"We could see her easily ahead of us. She had all her navigation lights on and her bomb doors open. Pring waited till he was very close. He always waited. Then he let her have it and the Jap lit up all over. I could easily see the red circlaves on the wings. She went down in a blaze and we swung over to starboard, then back to port. In a few seconds we saw two more bombers flying side by side. Pring took the right-hand one first and as she went down in flames he swung gently back to the left and got the other. He never stopped firing."

Four nights later they came back again. This time there were three of them. It was an Australian, Flying-Officer Crombie, who went up and intercepted the Jap bombers before they could drop any bombs. But the Japs spotted him and one of their gunners set his starboard petrol tank on fire and smashed up part of his cockpit. He stayed in the aircraft, with the fire raging, long enough to shoot down two of them and damage the third. Then both he and his navigator baled out.

It is hard to estimate the value of these two engagements. Since that night, 19th January, 1943, the Japs have never attempted a night raid on Calcutta. The morale of the shaken people of Bengal rose as quickly as it had fallen, for they are an emotional people and these two fights had caught their imagination. They smacked of magical powers. Indeed, they had been made possible by magical powers, the mystery of radio location, and the courage and marksmanship of two teams of young R.A.F. night-fighters. Labour came back to the factories and jute-mills and docks. Servants came back to the hotels and sweepers to the streets. The effect was electrical and as great as if the army had won a smashing victory in the field.

There were two ironical factors which followed on this exhilarating event. Because one Jap crew had lived to tell their version of what had happened we were compelled to pretend that it had been the Hurricanes which had done the

work. This meant keeping the two navigators out of the story to whom so much of the victory was due and one of whom had baled out after the *Beau* had caught fire. The other irony, sad and bitter, was the fact that neither by day nor night did the Jap bombers return to Calcutta for nearly a year, a year during which many a Marwari moneylender made money out of the poor; a year which saw the scourge of famine, the fattening hoarders of the black market, and the muddling bureaucrats of the central government entangle and corrupt the Indian economy. The country was made safe to a large extent by these four young men for more selfishness and graft than even poor, tortured India had seen and suffered in decades—from January to December.

Then, on the first Sunday morning of December, 1943, in broad daylight the Japs came again and bombed the docks. Pring, who was waiting for a boat to take him back to England, took off twice in a Hurricane to intercept. On the second sortie he was shot down and killed.

.

In February, Wingate went into Burma with his long-range penetration groups. It was the first ball of the British Army's return match with the Japs on their home ground, the jungle. It was bowled by a brave and brilliant man who believed in the character and intelligence of the English soldier; who was convinced that with good training and good leadership he was more than a match for the Jap in the jungle and out of it. He had with difficulty persuaded G.H.Q. India to believe him. Only the backing of Wavell finally gave him the opportunity he was seeking, an opportunity which has borne the very greatest results in the reconquest of Northern Burma this year—after his death.

The Burma front is a mysterious affair, and when knowledgeable folk talk about its length in terms of a thousand miles, most people's reaction is one of bewilderment. The fact remains that from the top north-east corner of Assam where the India plain pokes its little finger into the fold of the Himalayas, down to the point on the Arakan coast, north of Akyab, where the Mayu range tapers off into the Bay of Bengal, there stretches a tangle of mountain, forest, and jungle for a thousand miles. The hills rise in places to nearly ten thousand feet and in the monsoon the R.A.F. pilots have to fly blind through seas of cloud more turbulent than the waves of the Atlantic.

In this barrier, where the mountains run in walls from north to south, there are only three breaches where an army can force its way through from India to Burma. It can squeeze its way through the little wicket-gate in the south between the Mayu hills and the coast, where there is a gap of a few miles. For the possession of this gate we fight what seems to be a pointless and wasteful campaign every winter. It can penetrate into the magic valley of Manipur which sits like the floor of a dried-up lake in the middle of the sweep of hills and which before the war was unknown save to naturalists like Kingdom Ward and the few I.C.S. who had been posted there. It is a high valley with a dry climate, rich in rice fields and beautiful birds, surrounded by the mountains which here decide to be gentle and soft in contrast to their neighbours, which stretch fierce and impenetrable to the north and south. Here the Creator repented for a little while—the valley is only thirty miles long—then continued to throw the hills and jungles about in twisted shapes cut into by deep and silent ravines. You can follow the Dimapur Road from Assam into this hidden valley, then follow the track out of the valley due east through the Somra hill tracts down to the Chindwin and so into northern Burma.

The last breach in this green wall is in the north where the Hukong valley presents a possible—but only just possible—way through from the far north-eastern corner of Assam into northern Burma. It was through this malarial valley that Vinegar Joe Stillwell, Chiang Kai Shek's American military adviser, had fought his way out of Burma in the fateful spring of 1942. It was through this route that Burchett and George Roger struggled out in a jeep and saw as they came out of the green hell of the jungle that 'red moon rising' over the prostrate body of Burma; it was the blood-red moon of Jap domination and repression which will continue until we can push the vile little men out of the peaceful valleys and villages of Burma. Since he arrived there has been no peace, no prosperity, and no pleasure for the people of the country. It is through this route to the most northerly town of Myitkyina, pronounced mysteriously Michinar, that Vinegar Joe has gone back and driven the little man out of the Hukong valley, while the bulldozers of the American construction companies follow up his Chinese and American troops, building the Ledo Road to China on which the Americans set so much store.

These are the three breaches in the wall which, perhaps providentially, divides India from Burma.

In February, 1943, Wingate went through the middle one and Wavell, the commander-in-chief, saluted his brigade in the Imphal plain before they set off.

I first saw Wingate when he came back to Delhi, three months later. He came through my office to see Ivor, who was next door, and he slipped through the room furtively, almost like a ghost. I remember most clearly his old-fashioned topee and a pale face, ill but intense. He was accompanied by a young-looking Flight-Lieutenant, Bobbie Thompson, who I think at that time, after the expedition, was acting as his A.D.C. But the impression I had was one of a Guru and his acolyte. I think that was the strength of Wingate—he bound his officers to him like a saint his disciples.

The publicity was well handled by Ivor, some said too well handled, and the Press conference at which the news was officially broken was one of the most dramatic of the war. It was held in the scruffy room at the back of G.H.Q. and Ivor led off in that embarrassed, defiant way which always showed him at his worst. But he couldn't spoil this occasion. It was Wingate's moment and he took it in both hands, starting off with an apology to the hard-boiled newspaper men which sounded almost as if he was showing off.

"I'm not used to this sort of thing, so if I don't make myself clear you must be indulgent." Wingate talked without stopping for an hour and the correspondents were spellbound.

He spoke in clear, beautiful English, and I thought I was back at Cambridge listening to Trevelyan or Francis Bennet. He told of how he had fought reaction and muddled thinking in high places; of his belief in the ordinary Englishman and in particular in those Englishmen of the older age-groups who formed the majority of his Chindits; of his contempt for the Jap; of his admiration and liking for the Burmese villagers; and above all of his new methods of warfare, the chief characteristic of which was the use of transport aircraft to supply his columns and so make them independent of normal lines of communication. In his opinion he had demonstrated the success of his theories, for he had taken a brigade across the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy over two hundred miles into enemy territory; he had engaged the attention of more than ten times his own numbers; he had blown a vital railway in more than seventy places and disrupted Jap communications for two months in northern Burma; above all he had restored the faith of the British soldier in

himself and had shown that with his independent mind he was more than a match for the fundamentally stupid Jap peasant, even in the jungle where he was thought to be invincible.

There were plenty of critics, mostly among the army, which was surprising considering he had shown them how to fight the Jap. Perhaps that was the reason. I remember Peter Fleming saying once that Wingate had always been unorthodox in the army and consequently unpopular. One army regular said: "Oh, Wingate. Yes, I remember him at the Shop. He never used to cut his hair." Some complained of his ruthlessness and the way he had left so many casualties behind to the mercy of the Japs. Considering the nature of his operation the casualties were not heavy and every man knew the penalty of 'stopping one'. This was perhaps his greatest problem, and in his unorthodox brilliant way he had already thought of a solution—for the next away match.

Bobby Thompson had been at my school and in his room at the Cecil Hotel—his first roof for three months—he told me much of what happened to him and of the aerial part of the expedition. He outlined 'the Brigadier's' plans for overcoming the dreadful problem of the wounded men.

"The Brigadier plans, if he can get support, to use light planes next time which can skim over the trees and land in a paddy field to take off the wounded. That would raise the morale of the troops enormously and, besides, it would help us to locate the enemy and make us more effective."

Bobby told us many tales of the expedition and laid particular stress on the success of Wingate's idea that R.A.F. officers with recent operational experience should accompany each column so that a safe dropping zone for the supply aircraft should be chosen and one in which the supply pilots should have complete confidence. This worked admirably and the columns were supplied by 31 Squadron with amazing success by day and night for three months.

Even more revolutionary ideas were cooking in Wingate's head which had been suggested by the remarkable feat of one of the 31 Squadron pilots, Michael Vlasto, who had been trained with me at Risalpur. Before the war he had been with Ralli Brothers, in Calcutta. One of the columns commanded by Major Scott was struggling out and was in difficulties. A number of the men were sick and wounded. They had fought a severe action with the Japs who knew where they were. Their chances of getting back to India were slim until one day they came on a clearing in the jungle where it seemed to them a Dakota troop-carrying aircraft might perhaps be able to land. They asked for a supply drop, and when the aircraft came over they spelt out on the ground with their parachute silk the words: 'Plane land here.' The pilot dropped a message asking several questions about the field and its surface, which were answered by the column's wireless and next day Michael Vlasto came in with his Dakota and a fighter-escort of Mohawks—they were only fourteen miles from a Jap fighter airfield.

The Dakota landed safely, but that meant nothing, as an aircraft can land in a much smaller space than it can take off. Besides, he was empty except for six-foot-six *Life* photographer, Bill Vandivert, who scooped the world with one of the best photographic stories of the war.

Michael Vlasto taxied to the down-wind end of the clearing and calmly switched off the engines. Then he lighted a cigarette while Bill snapped the weary Chindits and arrangements were made for the worst cases to be flown out. After twenty minutes, seventeen hollow-eyed and weary men were

embarked and the crucial moment for take-off from the seven-hundred-yard clearing arrived. There were trees at the end of the field.

Bill Vandivert said afterwards: "Boy, was I afraid! When I looked at the pilot after we had cleared the trees there was a pool of sweat in Michael's lap. Was I glad to see those trees go by!"

So they got back to base with their seventeen warriors and Michael got the immediate D.F.C. He had done more than rescue those seventeen men. He had proved that a big transport aircraft can land in broad daylight behind the enemy lines and get away with it. This was something of which few people realized the significance at the time. But Wingate wove many plans around that isolated event, and when he went to Quebec with Winston Churchill he asked for a fleet of transport aircraft and for squadrons of light hedge-hoppers and for baby bulldozers and for gliders and rubber boats with outboard motors, helicopters, and things which were strange, even outrageous to the normal military mind; but they made so much sense to Churchill and Roosevelt, Mountbatten and Arnold, that American factories went into production at once; and now, in the summer of 1944, northern Burma is in a fair way to being cleansed of the Japanese—although Wingate has not lived to see it happen.

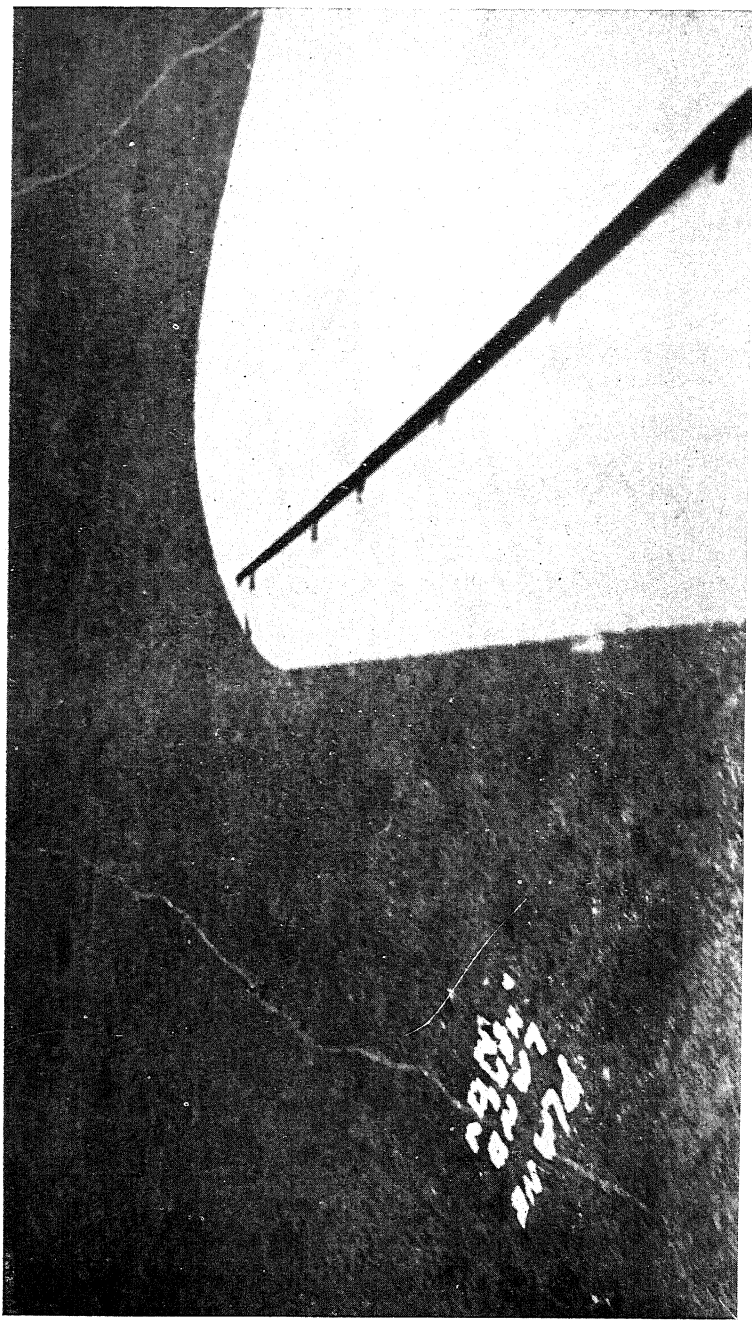
Wingate used every means in his power to put over his ideas. One means was the Press, and from that first conference in Delhi he won them wholly to his side. The three correspondents who had gone with him as far as the Chindwin, Martin Moore of the *Telegraph*, Stuart Emeny of the *Chronicle*, and Jacob of the *Express*, had all written fine stories. They had all found in him a fabulous creature who provided them with endless material. A soldier who made sense to the layman and who even listened to the views of the correspondents was bound to have their loyalty and support. Stuart Emeny followed him even into the last valley from which there is no return.

One of the biggest losses of the campaign had been the death of the young Indian Army Observer, Captain Moti Lal Katju, who was sent by Ivor as Wingate's P.R.O. He had won the M.C. in the western desert and was one of the most popular P.R. officers in the Middle East and in India. Without any hardening or training he went in with Wingate's brigade column and stayed with him until they were almost out of Burma. He was ambushed and shot in a village just beyond the Chindwin one day before the Brigadier and John Jefferies swum across to India and safety. His diary went with him, and one of the finest records of the campaign was lost as well as one of India's best young men.

Gradually the Chindits faded from the public mind. Wingate left Delhi. John Jefferies, the Commando, and Bobby Thompson, the R.A.F. officer with the M.C., left for a lecture tour of America and the luckier of the correspondents were recalled to England and America by their papers. Poor old Bob Cooper of *The Times* was one of the few who was left behind to swelter in the heat of a Delhi summer. So we settled down to innumerable games of tennis at the Gymkhana and to gossip afterwards on the lawn. It was then we compared Indian politics with those of the French Republic and decided to write a thesis about it, but the thesis usually dissolved into reminiscences of Montparnasse, Montmartre, and the Café de la Paix.

Some in Delhi might dislike Wingate's language and his Lawrence-like disregard of convention. Churchill thought differently, and he slipped away by air to England unnoticed even by his friends, the correspondents. When he turned up again in India scarcely a soul knew that he had been at the Quebec conference. There was real trouble brewing for the Japanese in Burma.

.



A DAKOTA AIRCRAFT OF 31 SQUADRON R.A.F. ABOUT TO LAND BEHIND THE JAP LINES DURING THE 1943 WINGATE OPERATIONS. The aircraft took off 17 sick and wounded men. The words, 'plane land here now', are spelt out in strips of parachute silk.



MAJOR-GENERAL WINGATE TALKING TO COLONEL COCHRANE, U.S.A.A.F.,
shortly before the launching of the 1944 air invasion of Burma.

Gremlins are well-known little people nowadays, but two years ago few outside the Air Force had ever heard of them, and many inside it had scarcely made their acquaintance. That is to say, they had probably suffered much at the hands of these goblins, particularly during their training, without having seen them. Gradually the R.A.F. found out more and more about them and their womenfolk, the Fifinellas, until nowadays no pilot goes up without a thorough knowledge of their habits; and many air crews of course have seen them.

We must have had many which had grown up with our old Wapitis, but the first I ever heard about them was in a lecture at Koggala in Ceylon. I was sitting at the back of the lecture-room listening with one ear to Tom Maxwell Hudson, a Catalina pilot, explaining how you would set about attacking an enemy port if you were told to. Most of my attention was wandering to the beautiful lake which I could see out of the window and which stretched away beyond Spurs Island into the distance. A Catalina was running up its engines and chasing its tail in a circle of foam. I think Tom felt the prospect of attacking an enemy harbour was academic, as I did. He often looked at his watch.

Then I heard him mention a word which I didn't understand. I listened more intently and in a moment he had repeated it. "Then you get back into cloud—if there is any—and pray there are no Gremlins about." I wondered what a Gremlin was. After the lecture we wandered over to the officers' mess and I said: "Tom, what is a Gremlin?"

"Good Lord, haven't you ever come across a Gremlin?"

I said I thought not, but would he explain.

It appeared that Gremlins were a race of aerial hobgoblins who always interfered with well-meaning types in the Royal Air Force by oiling up their plugs, jamming their wireless sets, upsetting their instruments, and even tampering with aerodromes.

"You must occasionally have made a heavy landing, I suppose," enquired Tom, suavely. "Well, that was most probably the clan of runway Gremlins who think it fun to lower the level of the runway just as chaps like you and me are about to shake our flight commanders by doing a three-point landing. The other day I ran my Catalina on an uncharted rock here in Koggala Lake. It was my own personal Gremlin who put it there. I've seen him once. He has a long tail and looks like a gargoyle."

In this way I learnt about Gremlins, and here is a story about a Gremlin who once did a good deed, and he did it to Tom Maxwell Hudson, about three months after our conversation.

At the beginning of 1943, circumstances in the S.W. Pacific required that we should pull a bluff on the Japanese. It is not possible to go into much detail beyond saying that the final instrument for pulling off this bluff, which had been planned in Very High Circles somewhere near St. James's Park, was none other than Tom. Had they known it, there could have been no more redoubtable instrument, for he had been a policeman and was, as they say, a very rugged gentleman. There were two more Catalina captains involved, Squadron-Leader 'Sweepy' Stacy and Squadron-Leader Scott, a Canadian. They commanded three Catalinas, one from a Canadian squadron and two from an English squadron. Their job was to fly a thousand nautical miles from Ceylon to Sabang on the north-west tip of Sumatra, not far from Singapore, and to bomb the harbour. Tom's lecture had come to life, and with a round trip of a thousand miles there looked to be surprisingly little future in it. There nearly wasn't for Tom and his crew. But there was the Gremlin.

They all took off in daylight so as to reach Sumatra just after dusk. 'Sweepy' and Scotty found Sabang without difficulty and attacked the wharves with bombs and guns. 'Sweepy' used his Cat like a dive-bomber. There was no opposition to speak of and neither boat was damaged. Tom had some trouble with his navigation on the outward journey and hit the Nicobar islands by mistake. This put him behind the others, which was dangerous.

Eventually he arrived over Sabang, pleased to have found the target at last, and in his debonair way flew very low over the harbour distributing his bombs like pieces of cake to the Japanese, who possibly, he thought, would be asleep in the mess or playing darts. Poor Tom's Catalina, O for Orifice, as she was inelegantly called, caught all the small-arms fire which should have been fired at the other two and the Japanese gunners must have been so surprised at his stately passage past their open sights that they failed to bring him down.

As it was they made 143 holes in the hull and in an effort to side-step a particularly red-hot burst of tracer he hit the water, submerged one engine and damaged a float. He managed to heave the flying-boat out of the water and struggled off on one engine. Thinking the submerged engine was finished he switched it off and feathered the air-screw. He wallowed out of range on his starboard engine.

Then he began one of the most extraordinary return trips in the history of this war. He jettisoned nearly every fitting in the boat, including his radio, and flew back for a thousand miles on one engine resting on that small cushion of air which separated the hull from the Indian Ocean ten feet below.

"You see," Tom told me, afterwards, "it was my Gremlin who sat on the tail and pushed us on by blowing on the good air-screw. Sometimes he pushed the cushion of air a little tighter underneath the hull if he thought it was coming out. But on that occasion he did the right thing. It was the only time he did."

The funny thing was, when they landed at Koggala after that epic trip and were taken quickly up the slip before the water could leak up through those 143 holes in the hull, someone tried the bad engine and it started up like a bird. The immersion at Sabang had done it no harm! When I next see Tom I shall ask him about that Gremlin. I think he had the laugh on O for Orifice and its gallant crew after all.

But the Bluff worked and Tom got his gong.

CHAPTER IX

FALSE DAWN IN ARAKAN

WHILE THE LONG-RANGE penetration groups were experimenting with Wingate's ideas on jungle fighting in the central part of the jungle wall dividing India from Burma, the Eastern Army, under General Irwin, was trying once again the orthodox methods in the Arakan coastal strip—the southern wicket-gate to Akyab. The original intention was to attack this little port from the land and from the sea. But there was the inevitable delay. The landing-craft could not be produced in time, so the amphibious part of the plan—the only aspect which promised success—was off.

The decision was taken to go through with the land plan, which involved attacking down the coastal strip into the 'Land of the great Image' south of Chittagong.

The Eastern Army moved south on 18th December, 1942. Instead of fierce opposition from the Japanese they fell through an open door and walked into the little village of Maungdaw unopposed. The B.B.C., always a bad offender in these days, announced that we had begun to reconquer Burma and inferred we should be in Rangoon by Christmas.

Roger Falk and Colonel Beard, Ivor's deputy, produced an admirable statement for the Press insisting that our advance was a local affair. This steadied the correspondents, but the B.B.C. message had already been embroidered and elaborated in New York. The damage had been done and most people all over the world, expecting as they did at that time a sudden reversal of our fortunes, were only too ready to see an Allied Invasion in the smallest forward movement of our troops on any front. For this reason alone, once the landing-craft were not available, it would probably have been wise to have dropped the Arakan campaign. But it is easy to be clever after the event.

The Eastern Army soon came up against the Jap positions, but not soon enough. The bugbear of supply, which Wingate had realized to be the limiting factor of campaigns in this theatre, now made itself felt. Supplies for the army had to come through the port of Chittagong farther north, then down creeks and rivers or the single road which linked the battlefield with its base. Untimely rains and heavy traffic dislocated this link. The army had to wait for its food and ammunition. The Japs dug in on the Donbaik peninsular, which looks tantalizingly across a stretch of water at the second-hand prize of Akyab with its corrugated iron roofs and drooping palm trees.

Then the supplies caught up and the army moved forward in conventional formations and patterns. The campaign had begun and the Japs stuck firmly in their fox-holes.

There were a number of war correspondents covering this campaign, British and American. Gordon Waterfield, of Reuters, spent a lot of time at the front and was shot up by Jap fighters in a sampan. They were punting down a backwater near Maungdaw; Waterfield, Briggs of the American *U.P.*, Burchett of the *Daily Express*, and a conducting officer. The sampan was large and had a roof like a Boer covered wagon. A flight of Army OI fighters spotted them and made several runs at the boat. Fortunately they came at them flat along the water and many bullets went wide, but Burchett was quite badly wounded and Briggs was hit in the backside. Later he was given the Purple Heart by Major Fred Eldridge, the American P.R. chief in Delhi.

The most discerning despatches of this first Arakan campaign were written by Bob Cooper of *The Times*. It was, I think, an indication of the way the war had to be conducted in India that Bob could write better dispatches in Delhi than the other correspondents who were slogging through the undergrowth of the Mayu hills. I suppose it is always difficult for a correspondent to decide between the base and the front line. In India the difference was more marked than in any other theatre both in distance, fourteen hundred miles, and in atmosphere. Delhi had nothing remotely warlike in its gabardine loftiness. But it is difficult to think of an alternative. Since then Mountbatten has exchanged the artificiality of Delhi for the remoteness of Kandy. Distances often defeat good intentions in India.

The Americans were particularly critical of Delhi as a base. They enjoyed

its flesh-pots, but their professional crusading spirit, which dies so hard and which sees the sinister hand of imperialism in the most unlikely places, seemed to think that there was something suspicious about running the war from Delhi. I think few people realized that Delhi was really like Whitehall or Washington. Sir Richard Peirse, in consultation with Wavell, laid down the broad principles of the air war. Bill Williams, now an Air Vice-Marshal, commanding Bengal Command, gave his Group Commanders more detailed orders and so on down the line until eventually the squadron commander said how it was to be done and led his aircraft into the attack. The Americans take such a personal view of war, as of all other activities, they feel that the General is on a telephone line to the platoon commander. Oddly enough, such were communications that if any General had wanted to do so, Delhi was the best place in the whole of India from which to do it.

The Arakan campaign trailed on inconclusively through February, March, and April. Gradually the casualties from malaria outstripped those from Jap bullets. The Japs began to outflank us to the east of the Mayu hills and General Irwin began to look anxiously over his shoulder at the solitary link with his base. We still didn't know what to do if the enemy outflanked us and threatened our lines of communication. We hadn't the aircraft to supply them. The idea of aerial bus convoys, dispensing with roads and following the limitless and invisible tracks of the sky, had only occurred to Wingate and he was exploiting them to the full, two hundred miles behind the Jap front line. So the inevitable retreat began. By the end of April we had abandoned Maungdaw, which the B.B.C. had hailed triumphantly as the beginning of the re-occupation of Burma. Wavell flew to the front and took Bob Cooper with him. Inspired reports gave a variety of reasons for our failure. I doubt if any of them satisfied the relations of those who had died in this tragic business.

We always wished in those days, before our heads were knocked together in a unified command, that we could get to know the Americans better. Thanks to Richard Cartwright we did—a little. Richard had been brought out to India by Roger Falk in September, 1942. He was what is known as an air adviser, a sort of super-censor and watch-dog, trained in the All Souls of all censors, A.I.6, at Air Ministry. His Canadian origin and gentle scepticism endeared him to Americans and British alike. He was an ideal link, and had he lived into the time of the joint S.E.A.C. he would have done invaluable work. As it was, in '42 and '43 there was little communion between the Americans in Delhi and G.H.Q., more owing to distance and a lack of petrol than anything else.

Richard was always dreaming and scheming of the post-war world. A mutual interest in federation as an ideal of international government and the commonwealth as a model on which the future might be built, brought us together. We schemed and dreamed through one spell of intolerably hot weather. Then he went to the front for a short tour and his Hudson crashed at Allahabad, where he will lie for ever in the military cemetery.

.

One interesting development in the R.A.F. in India at this time, the middle of 1943, was the employment in growing numbers of the dive-bomber. Ever since the beginning of the war, as a result of the success of the German dive-bombers, controversy had raged in the British Press about this weapon and the R.A.F. was urged to adopt it. Some people considered that it was not a good weapon and believed that the R.A.F. would never use it. In the desert we

developed the fighter-bomber, and this was claimed by the R.A.F. to be more efficient than the dive-bomber because it could fight after it had dropped its bombs. And then, as time went on, we shot down so many Stukas in the North African campaign that the anti-dive bomber school could say 'We told you so'. The truth of the matter was we gradually gained air superiority over the *Luftwaffe* so that the Germans were unable to protect their dive-bombers. We then shot them down in droves and Air Marshal Cunningham gave out that the dive-bomber was finished.

In Cochin I remember hearing a graphic description of how the aircraft carrier *Hermes* was sunk by Jap dive-bombers within sight of the shore of Ceylon. The *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall* went at the same time, in the same way, in that fateful April, 1942. As a weapon against ships and other more or less static targets it was undoubtedly effective, provided that the side using it had air supremacy. This was vital.

In India we suddenly found large numbers of Vultee dive-bombers unloaded on us at Karachi. Nobody wanted them very much, particularly when they showed the normal teething troubles of a new type. That is, nobody except the crews of the first two squadrons to be equipped with them, one of which was commanded by John Gill, who had been at Risalpur with me. He and his pilots determined to make a success of the Vengeance, and in a few months they were able to place their five-hundred-pound bombs within fifteen yards of their targets. It only remained to have air superiority over the Japs for the thesis to be tested, and by the monsoon of '43 this was assured.

Throughout the winter more and more Vengeance squadrons have gone into action over the Burma front under the umbrella of our fighters. Their losses have been infinitesimal and they have proved the most accurate form of artillery imaginable in jungle and mountain country where the fighter-bomber cannot see the Japs in their fox holes from his shallow dive, while the dive-bombers look straight down into the undergrowth. A classic remark of a dive-bomber pilot after returning from bombing Akyab was: "As I went down I passed the target going up."

In this way it was proved that you can use dive-bombers where you own the sky, and then they can be pretty useful, as Flight-Sergeant Belval, a French-Canadian, demonstrated when he averaged four yards from the pin with four bombs from a height of three thousand feet.

April 1st, 1943, was a double birthday, the R.A.F. was twenty-five and the I.A.F. ten. In India, where Sir Richard Peirse was trying to enlarge and improve the I.A.F.—the emphasis was on the I.A.F.—and birthday parades and celebrations were held all over the country. There was a great deal of publicity.

The main parade was held at Amballa, near Delhi, where so many of the Indian pilots had learned to fly. Wavell had consented to go, which pleased everybody. He made a delightful speech on the tarmac with a notable phrase which from nearly anyone else would have sounded embarrassing—"May the golden light of victory shine on your silver jubilee wings." This phrase appealed particularly to the Indian journalists who had turned up in strength in a Dakota which Air Vice-Marshal Collier kindly lent to us. I drove Marsland Gander of the *Daily Telegraph* to Amballa in my car. He was doubtful of coming at the last moment, as Bob Cooper had decided to stay in Delhi—some new members of the Viceroy's Executive Council were to be announced. He had already speculated to *The Times* quite correctly on the appointments

some time before. Marsland Gander came to Amballa and wrote a very colourful story for his paper. None of the Americans came.

Dudley Johnson took me in his Harvard in the formation which flew after the parade—he was senior instructor by now. We led the formation in a terrific peel-off down to the shamiana on the tarmac, where we fled past the generals, bigwigs, and beautiful saris of the Indian women in a flash of controlled speed.

There was a good march-past, a good speech by the C-in-C., an investiture of Jumbo Mazumdar and Aspy Engineer with their D.F.C.s, for which I read out the citations over the loud speakers, a good beano with an immense birthday cake, and then the party was over. The I.A.F. was ten years old. I hope I shall read about their silver jubilee.

CHAPTER X

CLOSE SEASON FOR CORRESPONDENTS

ALTHOUGH BENGAL COMMAND flew many more sorties in the monsoon of 1942 than during the previous year when the heavy rain clouds settled over the mountains, the tempo naturally slowed down. The Arakan campaign, a failure on the ground, had been a moderate success for us in the air, even with Blenheims and Hurricanes; it had called for large numbers of sorties in support of the army; when it came to an end and the rains emptied themselves from the clouds in bucketfuls, the tempo naturally declined.

In order to keep the correspondents interested in the doings of the R.A.F. and to encourage them to write what they call 'think' pieces, I arranged for several of those who had not been recalled by their papers to have interviews with the leaders of our air force in India. It was clear that in England little interest was being shown in the war against Japan. This was understandable, but at the same time it was important for the people of England to remember that the war would not end when the Germans were beaten. It was essential for them to keep firmly in mind that hundreds of thousands of highly trained men, now kicking their heels in the Far East, would have to go on fighting against the Japs, in many ways a more formidable enemy than the Germans—or, so we thought then; they were going to be extremely angry if England forgot about the Japanese war now and when the Germans were beaten scrambled for the jobs of peace.

The English correspondents were represented by Bob Cooper of *The Times* and Martin Moore of the *Daily Telegraph*. Graham Stanford of the *Daily Mail*, Harry Standish of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Marsland Gander, Sonia Tomara, and many others had left for England, the Middle East, or the States. I took Moore and Cooper in turn to see Air Vice-Marshal Baker, the S.A.S.O. With Collier he formed the second base of the triangle whose apex was Sir Richard Peirse and on which the safety and defence of India had depended since the disasters of 1942.

Baker is small and pale but he has a magnificent staff brain and an understanding of air power and its uses possessed by few. His powers of clear description are those of a university lecturer.

Bob Cooper asked a number of questions in his hesitating way, questions which went to the root of the military and air situation. Baker defined the rôle of the R.A.F. in India as twofold. First came the defence of Eastern India by offensive rather than defensive tactics. If Burma could be neutralized as a springboard from which to attack India, that objective could be achieved. This was being done, so far as the limited resources of aircraft would allow, by bombing raids directed against the airfields from which such attacks could be mounted. Our success had been considerable. The Japs had moved all their bombers and fighters back to the airfields round Rangoon and only brought them up to the strips in central Burma when they were planning a raid. These were tip-and-run affairs for the most part in support of their troops and took the form of tactical, rather than strategical, bombing. This was extremely important when the well-being and stability of the vast Indian population is considered.

The second part of their rôle he defined as the disruption of communications inside Burma to such an extent that the Japs could not exploit either militarily or economically their occupation of the country. It was much harder to assess the degree of success we were enjoying in this task. Our chief weapon was the Beaufighter, 'Whispering Death' it was called by the Germans. It had immense fire-power, long range, and was as fast as the Jap fighters. It was so quiet that it could materialize out of the clouds and disintegrate an enemy before he could hear it coming.

The principal targets of the Beaufighters were the limited number of railway engines left behind at the time of the retreat, the innumerable sampans and river-craft, large and small, which were the main form of travel and portage in that land of rivers, and the oil and petrol dumps which the Japs tried in vain to hide from the prying eyes and devastating cannon of the 'Whispering Death'.

Baker's confidence was refreshing. It was so different from the professional over-optimism which Eve Curie had noticed in so many of our leaders during her *Journey among Warriors* in the days of retreats and disaster. Baker had a plan and he had a growing number of aircraft—by no means the latest types—with which to carry it out. If he was given better fighters and heavier bombers in larger numbers he would achieve immediate air supremacy over the Burma skies. As it was he could guarantee the defence by day and night of eastern India and he had stopped nearly all enemy daylight movement by train and boat in central and northern Burma.

In reply to a question about the Jap Air Force Baker showed that he had studied their methods and tactics as carefully as Wingate had studied their army. He told Bob that in his view they were too stereotyped in their tactics and that in bombing it was possible to anticipate what they would do, as they usually did it in much the same way every time. They would come over fairly high with a large formation of bombers escorted several thousand feet higher up by an equally large number of fighters. At a given signal from the leader they would bomb in a pattern, and if they were undisturbed by enemy fighters they were usually fairly accurate. Nowadays they were being disturbed, but while Hurricanes could, and did, put them off their stroke, they were too old and too slow to shoot them down unless a stroke of luck or very early warning gave them time to climb high enough above the Japs. Then sometimes they could bring off a spectacular victory as they had done over Chittagong on 27th March, when they caught thirteen bombers without their escort over the battlefield and brought them all down.

He compared with this inelastic attitude our own flexibility. Into Sir

Richard Peirse's quiver he had placed a number of different sorts of arrow, mostly of an oldish pattern but all of which were being used to the best advantage. There were medium bombers, heavy bombers, dive-bombers, twin-engine fighters, single-engine fighters, night-fighters. They were all doing different things at different times, but they were flying all the time, day and night, wet or dry, so that the Jap in Burma was continually on his toes and was forced to travel by night and lay up in the day. In India, everyone slept by night and some of them, especially the R.A.F., were on their toes by day. Martin Moore got the same story, and I hoped that their editors would let at least the relatively restricted readership of *The Times* and *Telegraph* read about the R.A.F. on the far-away Burma front. Later, I took Graham Stanford upstairs to meet Jack Leather and a colourful extravaganza called 'Six Little Fighter Boys' was produced for two million readers of the *Daily Mail*, which I suppose was more effective than all the think pieces of the sober *Times* and *Telegraph*. The six little fighters boys were Dick Maling and his Mohawks, which in the spring of 1942 had been the only air defence of Calcutta.

Another interesting interview at this time took place between Bob Cooper and Wing-Commander Bill Burberry. Bob had asked me to put him in touch with someone who could explain to him the flying conditions over the Burma-Assam front in the monsoon months, from June to October. So I took him to see Bill Burberry, who had commanded 31 Squadron which had dropped all his supplies to Wingate and who knew more about flying over that territory than probably any other pilot. He had more than ten thousand hours' flying time to his credit and was eating his heart out in a staff job at Delhi. His face lit up when we came in and he saw the prospect of a few minutes' respite from the files, talking shop.

He turned to the enormous map of the Burma front which covered the wall behind his desk right up to the ceiling. In a moment he was back in his mind among the hills and jungle which that map represented, and had taken us with him from Fort Hertz in the far north down to Akyab in the south; had carried us 'over the hump' into China, where the mountains rise to sixteen and seventeen thousand feet; and he had brought us back to the airfields of Bengal from where his beloved Dakotas took off on their journeys through that wall of cloud which the Americans expressively call the overcast.

"In the rainy weather I think it is the worst flying country in the world with the possible exception of the Belgian Congo," Burberry said. "What makes it particularly bad is the turbulence in the cumulus clouds which rise above the mountain barrier to heights above twenty thousand feet. The Dakota crews have to fly through this cloud barrier for as much as an hour before they get into the clear air on the other side. And of course they have to fly back through it to return to India. They get so thrown about that sometimes the aircraft almost break up. It's the turbulence which makes it so bad."

It was clear from his tanned and weathered face that he would give anything to be back with his squadron, leading them through the mountains and the mists with their parcels of food and stores for the friendly Chins and the isolated road builders at Tiddim, south of Imphal, where we were building another road into Burma. Next year the Japs were to capture Tiddim and the road, but the transport aircraft were doing their job and gradually demonstrating their versatility and usefulness. Next year they were to come into their own and steal the show from the fighters and bombers. Wingate's theories were to be upheld—upheld and put into practice on an immense scale. And Bill Burberry was to go back to command 31 Squadron.

On 15th September, in common with the R.A.F. the world over, we celebrated the Battle of Britain. It was the day on which Fighter Command had brought down 185 German aircraft and turned the tide of that critical struggle. Jack Leather had got a left and right on that day, one before lunch and one before tea. Sir Richard Peirse sent for me and said he would broadcast an address to the officers and other ranks of A.H.Q. in the Irwin Stadium and the Press could attend. So I set to work on his broadcast and asked Jack Robertson to write a short address which was to be signalled to all stations in the country and which would be read out by C.O.s to their troops. I didn't trust myself to do justice to the occasion. He wrote a simple, moving piece which was well received except by one Group which could always be relied upon to make a boner. In one part of the short message we had referred to the two hundred and fifty aircraft sent over by Goering on the morning of 15th September, 1940. This Group had said: "Surely didn't we mean two thousand five hundred?" The battle would probably have gone the other way if Goering had been able to do that.

Sir Richard Peirse recorded his speech on the 14th and on the 15th addressed 'his family', as he called us, at the Irwin Stadium. The last phrase of his speech I well remember: "Now the monsoon is over we shall go to it with increased aircraft and increased vigour. The new campaigning season is on and I wish you Good Hunting."

This phrase caused a lot of trouble, as the speech achieved wide publicity in England as well as India. There was much speculation as to whether we had anything special up our sleeve for the new campaigning season. Sir Richard said laughingly: "Whenever I open my mouth I seem to get a rocket!"

Looking back on the season I think we had quite a lot up our sleeve, but Very High Circles were so scared of false optimism and of being proved wrong after the event, they were over-cautious, even of that professional confidence which could well give expression to itself at times like these when we were stretching ourselves and trying out our newly-found strength and growing skill. Sir Richard Peirse did not boast. He was confident; confident that in the coming winter we should, with the help of the Americans, sweep the Jap Air Force from the skies of Burma and Eastern India.

CHAPTER XI

S.E.A.C. IS BORN

IT WAS IN the middle of June, 1943, that the impending formation of South East Asia Command was announced. In the same Reuter message Wavell's elevation to Viceroy and Auchinleck's to Commander-in-Chief India were made known.

I remember the duty officer in the Press room brought the message to me at 6.30 in the evening. Ivor was in the Middle East, Wavell was in America, and there was an air of listless indifference in Delhi. The war in the West was passing through one of its *entr'actes*. The war in the East was marking time, some said until 1948. Nobody loved us.

As I looked at the long piece of buff paper torn off the ticker machine I

tried to think out quickly what it all meant. I think I did realize that somebody at last meant business in this part of the world; that perhaps we should get aircraft, landing-craft, and aggressive planners; that we should stop being the 'forgotten front'.

I went upstairs to Collier's office and showed him the message. He said simply: "Thank God." I realized at once that this new command would be a law to itself. It would obviously operate from India to begin with, but it would be a law to itself. It would have its own finances. It is fashionable, especially among men of action, to criticize treasuries the world over. It is always the dead hand of the bureaucrat who sanctions too little and too late. I suppose they have their job to do.

It must be said in favour of that cumbersome and exasperating machine, the Government, that much as fresh minds from England and progressives of all kinds might rave and rant and recall the comparative speed of Whitehall, when their turn came to hustle India they found it difficult. There is something in the air and in the distances which make hay of good intentions. But change is always refreshing, and we felt as if a gale of fresh air was blowing from the Saint Lawrence and had swept into the cobwebs of New Delhi. Graham Stanford wrote about 'red blood pulsing through the hardened arteries of G.H.Q.'. It was the same thing. Later, rather sadly, I remembered the French saying: '*Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose.*'

There was a long pause between the announcement of the new Command and the publication of Lord Louis Mountbatten's name as the Supreme Commander; and an even longer one before the command got started. In the interval Auchinleck carried on as C-in-C. India, and Colonel Beard as Director of Public Relations. Ivor was in Egypt; then when he came back he retired for a holiday to Kashmir. One day the Auk decided to hold a confidential Press conference. He was being pestered daily, particularly by the Indian correspondents, to tell them, off the record, how the war was going. I may be quite wrong, but I have always found that the Press and the general public have a false impression that every very senior officer, and especially commanders-in-chief, possess a mass of inside information about the higher conduct of the war. From the little I have seen they know scarcely anything outside their own command, apart from what they pick up in the form of Higher Gossip from passing friends. The war cabinet and their instrument the Chiefs of Staff Committee keep their plans to themselves and only divulge them in the form of directives to the commanders who are to carry them out.

The Indian journalists wanted Auchinleck to tell them exactly when the war against Germany would end and what the Russians intended to do when they got into Europe. The Auk had all the usual intelligence summaries, and probably some unusual ones as well, but so had many an officer on his staff. Anyway, in the course of time he agreed to give the off-the-record conference and Bill Beard was told to produce a summary of the war situation. Bill asked me to do it. So I put a cold towel round my head, piled up the latest 'gen' on the floor around me and travelled very confidentially round the battle-fronts of the world. It was easy and pleasant to say what was happening in the Atlantic and the Solomons, in Salerno and Veleuki Luki when you had the latest reports and information to your hand, but it was impossible to forecast the end of the war in the west, and when the Commander-in-Chief had a crack at it in the conference it sounded better than it does now. Which made me think that Very High Officers don't know anything like as much about what goes on outside their own cabbage patch as many people think.

On the margin of my essay—he had spoken extempore with great fluency—was written, in the style of the schoolmaster: ‘good, should be published’. I felt a glow of pleasure tempered by the thought of the intelligence summaries from which it had been culled, as if you had answered a difficult question in an exam with all the best authorities on the subject open on the desk as you wrote. Bill Beard passed it on to Clem Cave, the editor of that very excellent ‘think’ paper for the troops—*Weekly Commentary*.

He put it gently on the spike.

.

In the doldrums of this pause between one world which was not dead and a new one still waiting to be born, a few incidents stand out in the flat round of Delhi life.

Our Saturday afternoon football matches provided relief and exercise. Charles McNeill, the C.in-C.’s doctor, played inside right to my outside right and we fancied ourselves no end. Charles had played a lot somewhere; I hadn’t played since my prep school. Peter Fleming was a sort of roving left-centre-half-back with large black boots which looked more suited to the Koko Nor than Willingdon Crescent football ground. I only had tennis shoes, so kept a long way from his radius of action. Charles scored most of our goals but we nearly always lost; once we had to recruit some barefooted little urchins to make up for absentees. They were very enthusiastic and refused to stop when the last whistle blew. It was the time of the bombing of Rome. The referee blew his whistle again without result.

“It’s rather like telling the Italians they have lost the war,” said Peter.

One evening Gunther Stein came to dinner. He had come to India to write some of the dispatches about China which he could not get through the censor in Chungking. I had heard several correspondents talk in disillusioned tones about China, but they had all been men and women who had paid the regulation call and come away. Gunther Stein had spent several years in Japan and was now the permanent correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* in Chungking. He was very well informed about China and Japan, and his disillusionment, never unkind to the Chinese with whom he clearly sympathized, was real. He talked about the economic penetration of the Americans and deplored that there were so few English other than diplomatic and commercial people in Free China. He thought that many Chinese were becoming overwhelmed by the weight of Americans and that English stocks would rise, as they had done in Australia and might even in India, if some disinterested Englishmen from our ‘mandarin’ classes could tell the Chinese something of the English life and character, our literature and art. They had altogether enough of Shell and Shipping and it looked like a job for the British Council and Harold Acton, the poet, who loved China so well and who was now a Flight-Lieutenant in the R.A.F. and one of my own officers.

Gunther Stein was an acute observer. He said something penetrating about India. “I cannot understand why you English have not established a loyal class of Indians by creating jobs of power and responsibility for them in the government and then giving those Indians your friendship and trust. You still keep up a barrier between yourselves and those who come over into your service. Their loyalty is not real, or how else do you explain the way the families, especially the wives, of your big Indian officials criticize England openly and gleefully?”

Will we ever be able to do this?

CHAPTER XII

A NEW LEADER

THE LONG PROCESSION of cars and buses wound its way through the Delhi cantonments to the airfield at Palam. It was a queer procession. There were a few staff cars and some shiny Buicks carrying the Americans. At the end was a broken-down country bus such as you only find in rural parts of India. We had to keep stopping while it dragged itself round a corner with its load of fuming and uncomfortable correspondents. It was not one of the best days for Mother Murphy, the head conducting officer. He looked like a New York cop who had wandered into the British Army by mistake.

We reached the airfield at 11.30. The station C.O. had been better than his word. He had laid on cold drinks and sandwiches in profusion which made up a little in the eyes of the correspondents for the indignity of the bus. Mother Murphy acquired some undeserved kudos from the Wing-Commander's bounty.

It always astonished me how war correspondents would materialize from the air in swarms as soon as any news was about to break. A few days earlier there was scarcely one of them in Delhi, in India for that matter, and nobody outside the Commander-in-Chief really knew when Mountbatten was due; yet there must have been nearly fifty of them on the tarmac, most of them had known the date several days in advance and quite a few knew that the Liberator which was carrying the new Supreme Commander to his new command was due at 12.30. The only thing they didn't know was 'Marco Polo', the name of the aircraft, and that was written in Chinese characters on the fuselage.

As the time approached the tarmac was sprinkled more and more with gold and scarlet. Auchinleck and Peirse; Admiral Somerville, C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet; the Americans all free and easy; General Stratemeyer, the youthful air force commander; General Wheeler, neat and sharp like a business executive; Wingate, a Major-General now and officially not present, much to the embarrassment of the photographers who had to avoid including him in any group; and Ivor hovering between the big shots and the army of journalists, not quite belonging to either. This warm piece of asphalt in the middle of the Delhi plain, where so many Kings and Captains have fought and strutted in days gone by, was a stage on which in a few minutes a simple scene was to be played—the entry of the Hero attended by his retinue. Having alighted from his fairy coach he would meet the commander of all the armies of Hindustan from whose soil he was to wage war against the wicked little men of Nippon. The Commander of all the armies of Hindustan, having welcomed the Hero, would then hand over his armies to the Hero, who would drive away in a large car. And this scene, which perhaps a hundred people would watch with their own eyes, would in a few moments have been described minutely to hundreds of millions of people the world over. In a few weeks those millions would see the Hero and the Coach and the blue-eyed General on the newsreels. The stage was set and Ivor, a self-conscious impressario, was hovering between the audience and the actors. Then, at 12.25, there was a hum in the air to the west. A speck became an aircraft, a black aircraft with four engines, a Liberator, and at 12.30 Wing-Commander Bedell touched down without a tremor on the long runway at Palam.

Each of the fifty-odd correspondents has described that scene and I think

they could be forgiven for writing mush. It was a colourful event instinct with drama. We have had so few electric leaders on our side and in this part of the world, at the end of every sort of supply line for so long, we had developed a forgotten complex. Here to lead us was the most dashing and romantic officer of the younger school, however much he himself might dislike those two epithets. Here was a fighting leader of Royal blood—the combination was ever so much better than either one or the other—with, so we had heard, modern ideas and a sword which cut through red tape like the bow of his destroyer, the *Kelly*. We have every right to be excited.

It was all as you might have dreamt it or read in a fairy book, and I'm not ashamed for saying as much. He came smartly down the ladder from the belly of Marco Polo backwards—which takes some doing on such an occasion, walked smartly up to Auchinleck, saluted as a sailor and shook hands. His smile was the most exhilarating thing I have ever seen, and by a stroke of luck Corporal Dowd, my best photographer, caught it in a picture which became world famous.

He was followed out of the expansive belly of Marco Polo by Micky Hodges, his signals officer, Arthur Leveson, his Flagg—both in the same elegant gabardine as Mountbatten—and John Keswick, alone and rather sinister in civilian clothes—"the foreign office," whispered a correspondent. "Nonsense," or something to that effect, said another.

Then began the handshaking and chit-chatting and flashing of bulbs and cranking of movie cameras and furious note-taking by the Press. The little scene was now nearly over, the world stood breathless in its vast invisible auditorium. Then up drove the large car and the Hero went off to lunch.

Ivor lived in 18 Ratendone Road, a small Delhi bungalow indistinguishable from so many other small Delhi bungalows except that there had probably been more bigwigs inside it than in any of the others. There were photographs of a few of them with signatures in Ivor's sitting-room. It was at this bungalow, on the terrace behind, that Mountbatten first met the war correspondents in intimate surroundings. The setting was reminiscent of Coward, with two orange trees in tubs flanking the terrace, a standard-lamp throwing a theatrical light on the scene, and over all a velvet sky. There were only a few correspondents, which made the party more intimate and the Supremo more expansive. Among the correspondents was Preston Grover, sceptical and determined, Eric Severeid, the Columbia Broadcasting reporter, who was the envy of the rest because he had recently shared in a *de luxe* adventure by parachuting from a transport aircraft with twenty other passengers over the Naga Hills *en route* to China. They had been fed on beer and chicken dropped by parachute until a rescue party picked them up. There was Bob Cooper and Jimmy Holburn of *The Times*, Gardner of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and one or two others. We had with difficulty scrounged some bottles of Scotch and I made a rum cocktail, which I'm proud to say the Supremo drank.

He arrived with his Chiefs of Staff, Pownall and Wedemeyer, the tall American, and for two hours he talked fluently and interestingly—about the war in Europe. The correspondents naturally tried to find out his ideas about his new command, but obviously he could say little, and anyway the gossip and backstage stories about the Sicilian campaign—past history by now, but not so past that the gossip which makes it come alive had percolated to our distant desert—were full of interest; in this way with great skill he kept the party what it was intended to be, an intimate affair in which both sides could get acquainted.

But there were some good stories. "At Quebec the Prime Minister said to me: 'How would you like to sort out the Burma business?' I thought he wanted me to produce a memorandum for the conference. Then I realized he was offering me this job, which was a shock, as you can imagine." Another: "As I was saying good-bye to the Prime Minister before leaving for India, I said: 'Thank you for your good wishes, sir, but I hope you realize this is seriously interfering with my naval career.'"

He said the Italian General commanding the defences of Sicily had told him a few hours after his capture that they only had about six hours' warning of the invasion fleet. He was extremely optimistic about the war in Europe, as was everybody in the West at that time. The hold-up in Italy and the mess-up in the Greek islands had not been foreseen and so much seems to have resulted from those delayed successes, so much to our temporary disadvantage. Much of what he forecast is coming to pass now.

The impression we all had was of a man who hated red tape and was determined that because something had never been done before was the best possible reason for doing it now. We could all feel the old fogies folding up their tents and their files and fading out into the mist. The infection of his enthusiasm and the magnetism of his personality caught even the most hard-boiled of the newspapermen for a little while.

Preston Grover: "Well, he's certainly a Somebody."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FORGOTTEN FRONT

STANDING IN FRONT of Air Marshal Joubert's desk I felt rather as if I was asking my housemaster for permission to leave a week early for the holidays. It was clear that I should have to go home on a trip; but when it came to the act of asking an Air Marshal, of putting the idea into the clothes of speech, I felt embarrassed. I suppose it was because I had not been to England since the beginning of the war and it all seemed so far away and so preposterous to go there by air in a day or two, like visiting the moon, that I thought there must be something wrong in the very asking. That was one of our troubles in India—we achieved an inferiority complex about ourselves after a year or so.

By this time I had exchanged masters. Air Marshal Joubert had come to Delhi as Chief of Information to S.E.A.C. Ivor Jehu remained as Director of Public Relations to the India Command. Joubert looked at me with a smile which twinkled, and said: "Of course you can go to England, provided you can clear your yard-arm with your own Commander-in-Chief." He said it as he might have said I could go to Bombay for the week-end. Things were, indeed, changing.

So I put up a minute to Sir Richard Peirse, setting out the reasons why I felt it advisable to go on a twelve-thousand-mile journey, and he wrote neatly and firmly on the bottom of the minute: "I agree this journey."

I had a few minutes with him in his spacious office with the blue pile carpet that very afternoon. My star was shining.

"I'm flying down to the front in a few days' time. Would you like to come?"

The trip would land me back in Delhi two days before I was due off to England and would just give me that background and colour vital to my English journey.

Charles Ralli, his A.D.C., was the only other on the trip. I knew him well—he was another 'Boxwallah'.

We took off on a cold December morning in the Dakota which Sir Richard had designed internally himself—as you might design a country house. It was the ideal aircraft for the long and tiring flights which the senior officers in these theatres have to undertake. It had bunks, it was insulated from engine noise, and there were four adjustable air-liner chairs. It had long-range tanks and had just come back from Cairo where Dudley Withers, the pilot, had flown Mountbatten to the conference overnight and non-stop. It was a useful aircraft and a comfortable one. It had to be.

After two hours' flying down the Ganges with the snow-line of the Himalayas etched thinly on the blue enamel of the sky far off to the north, Dudley came back from the cockpit and told Sir Richard we had a thirty-mile-an-hour tail wind and we would be in Comilla headquarters of the Fourteenth Army and of our own Third Tactical Air Force well ahead of time.

Sir Richard looked out of the window at the snow-line.

"How far is it to Everest?"

"About a hundred and twenty miles and some way off our course, sir," replied Dudley. And so among the many other pieces of luck which came my way at that time I was to fly up to the southern face of Everest in a well-warmed aircraft, sitting in an armchair and listening to the news from Delhi on the radio.

As we approached the mass of snow and ice with the plume of white smoke streaming away to the west from the summit, I thought of the many fine men who had toiled up the north col and the ridge to the summit on the far side of that southern cliff which we could see so clearly from our warm and comfortable platform. Mallory and Irvine; who knows if they ever reached the top? and Odell, who saw them for the last time; Smythe and Shipton and my old housemaster at Marlborough, Kempson. Then there had been the flyers in their open Westland Wallaces, first cousin to the Wapiti, who had flown in the biting cold of their open cockpits over these wastes of black rock and white snow into whose gaping dizzy depths I was now looking through the sliding panel of Dudley's cockpit. The great big American air-screw was turning lazily and with effortless confidence a yard to my left outside the window. What went on immediately below hardly bore thinking about. Beyond that wall down the ridge, at the bottom of the formidable col, must lie the Rongbuk Glacier, and not a few miles away as we were flying, the famous monastery which figured in the annals of each expedition and which seemed so far away, when you read about it in the books of those miraculous adventurers, one of the rewards of men who flee society and live in the strong air of the far-off places; and it was just over the hill from me now. Yet in reality it was just as far away as ever it had been, for we could never have lifted ourselves over that formidable bastion, for all our two-thousand horse-power, and although it looked as if you could lean out of the window and touch its icy flank there were fifteen miles or more of empty spaces between our puny being and that

majestic kingdom. We floated like a speck of dust in that immensity; and while we floated I leant out of the forward window into the tearing wind and tried to take some photographs.

All this time Sir Richard sat at the controls enjoying the detour to its fullest extent. It was nice to be able to say: "How far are we from Mount Everest?" and then take yourself there in a few minutes. I had never really felt the magic of flying so forcibly before.

At Comilla there were many old friends. Air Vice-Marshal Bill Williams was in process of handing over Bengal Command to Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin. Soon Bengal Command, which all who have served in it will remember with affection and regret, was to become a joint Anglo-American force known as the Third Tactical Air Force. His P.A., Alec Hogben, a walking model of the efficient secretary, made Charles and me extremely comfortable in the grounds of the old-world, early nineteenth-century bungalow where for generations the collector had ruled this tiny Bengal district, and where now the commander of the many aircraft, which daily and nightly zoomed and rocketed through the skies, spent his few sleeping hours.

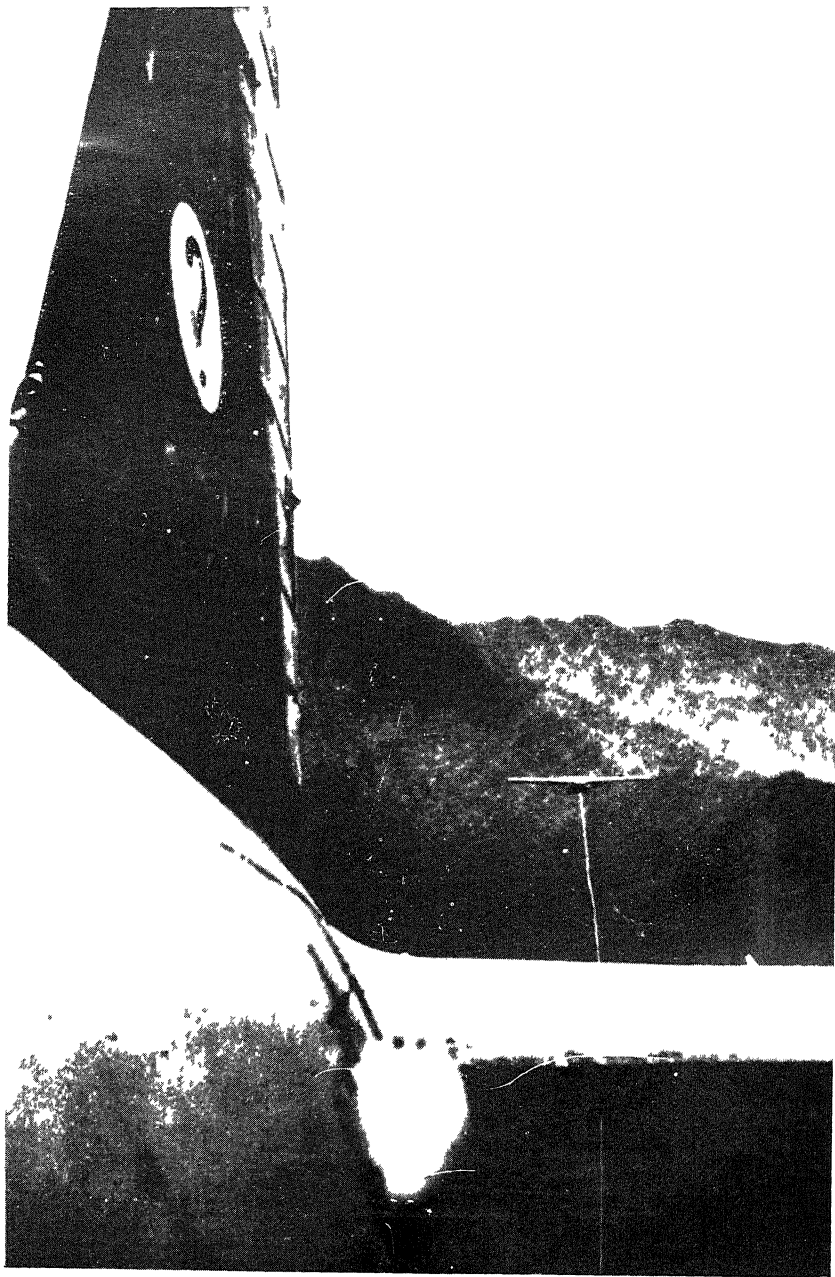
Comilla was the headquarters of the Fourteenth Army, that forgotten army which during this coming winter was to put itself very much on the front pages of the world Press. At the moment this army and its hand-maiden, the Tactical Air Force, was stretched along the Indo-Burma border, concentrated chiefly in the Arakan to the south and in Imphal at the centre. In the north at Ledo, the road-head of the new highway to China, was General Stilwell and his Chinese divisions. The stage was set for another season's campaigning and none of us knew what was to happen, where it would break, and who would begin first. Sir Richard was touring all his squadrons in the front line before Christmas. One difference from last year was the presence everywhere of America, both its supplies and its 10th Air Force, although in a few days the latter was to merge with the Bengal Command into the Tactical and the Strategic Air Forces, to which a third and most important force was to be added, the Troop-Carrier Command. If you look at the best American and R.A.F. fighter, then at their heaviest and most powerful bombers, and then at the maid-of-all-work, the Dakota transport troop-carrier, you would say that the actor who would not figure in the big lights would be the transport. Yet it was the Dakota which was to steal the show in the 1943-44 Burma Follies. There was to be glamour and to spare for squadrons which hitherto had regarded themselves as stooges. This was to be a very fine thing and a very fine story.

We had dinner that night in the basha hut, which is the mess of the Third Tactical Air Force. It was a simple hut, built like the village shacks of Eastern Bengal and indistinguishable on the outside from the many others in the town. These little matting-houses are the homes of all the R.A.F. in India now and have replaced the ugly, uncomfortable, and dreadfully obvious Victorian barracks which used to be their homes in the piping days of peace. The only disadvantage of the basha hut is apparent in the monsoon—they leak.

To-night by candle-light we had a better dinner, simple and better cooked than you can buy in the gilded haunts of Delhi. We discussed plans for the tour. It was decided that on the first day we should visit the squadrons in the Arakan, mostly fighter and dive-bombers, and on the second day the squadrons in the central sector at Imphal. That afternoon at Comilla we had inspected the Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron.



CROSSING THE CHINDWIN INTO JAP-HELD BURMA—1943 STYLE



CROSSING THE CHINDWIN INTO JAP-HELD BURMA—1944 STYLE

Wing-Commander Wise commanded a mixed outfit of Mosquitoes, American Mitchells, and one or two of the almost latest type of Spitfire. This was indeed a portent, for not only were we getting Spitfires for the PRU squadrons, but also for the Hurricane squadrons who were finding more and more that they could only cope with the Jap fighters and bombers with the aid of large slices of luck. And these were not always forthcoming.

One tall flying-officer told Sir Richard that he had been up to a height unprecedented in this theatre. Others spoke casually of opening the taps in their Mosquitoes over Rangoon and leaving the fastest Jap fighters standing still, impotent spectators of a new phenomenon in flying technique. One pilot had just returned from Bangkok in Siam over a thousand miles away. Sir Richard had watched his photographs being developed in the mobile dark room near the runway. In a few minutes he was able to look into the enemy's backyard—like Panglos in *Candide*—only Sir Richard could brew up a deal more trouble for the people into whose houses he peeped. He was brewing up plenty now for the inhabitants of the capital of Thailand. I wondered if the members of the mission which had come to Risalpur would be at the sticky end of the bomb-load. I rather hoped so.

Bill Williams arranged for me to fly in the back seat of a Vengeance on the following day to see at first hand how accurately they could bomb in support of the army. Then, when the time came, it was impossible to fit this flight in with the tour.

Sir John Baldwin and Air-Commodore Grey came with us in the Dakota; without them it would have been impossible to find the innumerable strips which lay snugly concealed in this coastal strip of paddy and palm between the hills and the sea. During a long day Sir Richard inspected nearly every squadron in this vital sector, among them No. 6 Squadron I.A.F., which had been formed from my old coast defence flight at Bombay and was now armed with Hurricanes and commanded by Meher Singh, one of the most redoubtable pilots in the I.A.F.

We saw a number of memorable sights during that crisp December day. I think the most striking to us all was a broad strip in the paddy fields near Ramu, south of the little port of Chittagong. On this wide swathe, cut through the bunds and stubble of the rice, tucked beneath palm trees and banana leaves, were the beautiful outlines of that most beautiful aircraft, the Spitfire. This was really something. There was no doubt that ever since the monsoon of 1942 we had achieved moral superiority over the Jap air force in Burma—the superiority which comes of guts and better flying. But the Hurricane was only superior to the Jap army fighter on his own terms and it was seldom that he could enforce these terms. For months, for over a year in fact, the fighter boys had pleaded for Spitfires, and so had Sir Richard, and now they were here, waiting in the rice-fields for that first unwary and unfortunate Jap formation which would sooner or later inevitably buy it in the biggest possible way and straggle back to Mingaladon wondering what had hit them. Already three of their high-speed, high-flying reconnaissance aircraft—the 'Recce 100'—which for months had been snapping our airfields and troop movements from thirty thousand feet with impunity, had been picked off with ease by these Spits. The Japs at Rangoon and Bangkok were probably already speculating on their fate. But these pilots of 607 and 615 Squadrons were waiting for the big stuff, they wanted to streak out of the rice-fields into a flock of fat army 99's, into a whole *Hikosentai* of the little yellow devils.

And now they were being inspected by Sir Richard Peirse, who was seeing

them for the first time. It must have been a great moment for him after the toil and sweat of the last eighteen months. It was only a year ago that I had still been doing patrols from Bombay, the busiest allied port in the Far East, in a converted air-liner.

I knew the C.O. of 615 Squadron slightly, Squadron-Leader Holland. He had known Paddy Green and several of my old friends of the ski-ing days before the war in Switzerland and Austria. Paddy, who had found a place in the England bobsleigh team, was now one of our most renowned night-fighter pilots with German victims in England, North Africa, and Italy to his credit. Roger Bushell we also talked of—Roger, who had been the most dashing and crazy of all English ski-runners after Chris Macintosh. Roger, who had led his squadron, the famous auxiliary 601, at Dunkirk, as if he was taking the Bubble straight at Mürren—only this time his impetuosity had cost him more than a 'split' fall in the snow of the Oberland. It had cost him imprisonment for three years in a German camp where, after three attempts to escape, he had been eventually shot in cold blood with fifty other R.A.F. officers of *Stalag Luft Three*.^{*} Poor old Roger. Funny how many of the skiers have turned out to be among the best fighter-pilots of the war.

As we were leaving 615 Squadron, of which the late Prime Minister is Honorary C.O., I saw three butterflies flap gaily past the smoke-blue wings of a brand new Spitfire. They tumbled and fluttered past in a riot of colour and abandon. For the life of me I don't know which were the more beautiful—the aircraft or the butterflies.

After lunch we visited 82 Squadron, the famous dive-bombers who had persevered for so long with the Vengeance and made it into one of the most successful weapons on this front. They were swirling through clouds of dust as we arrived, taxi-ing from the dispersals to the end of the broad grass strip. In a minute they were rumbling down the runway, ungainly heavyweights which had to be jerked off the ground protestingly after their pilots had given them enough time to take to the air by themselves. Soon all twelve of them were crabbing through the sky like a flight of Brahmini ducks and closing up on them from behind; from another strip, came their escort of twelve Hurricanes. It was a good feeling to see that procession of wild birds' flight to the south. It must have been even more agreeable for those who eighteen months before had seen nothing but the serried formations of the Jap air force bomb undisturbed in Malaya and the Far East. Crews from the Second Squadron were drawn up in a line to meet their Commander-in-Chief.

To the eyes of a regular soldier these inspections of fighting squadrons would have been a revelation and probably a rather distressing one. Pilots and Observers were drawn up in a rough-and-ready line probably either just before going up or just after coming down. They looked like Tom Sayers' gang about to pledge themselves in blood to kill or capture all the peaceful citizens of the Mississippi valley. They were none of them dressed alike; some wore shorts with shirts tucked inside them; some had their shirts Mahomedan fashion, flapping in the breeze; some wore corduroy trousers, others khaki slacks; all carried some sort of a jungle-knife at his side, revolvers were usually slung professionally on a piece of string with a half-hitch. Their headgear had to be seen to be believed, ranging through nearly everything you have seen in the east, blue side caps—very worn and weary—caps, service dress, also battered and arched in astonishingly successful emulation of that priceless air force character, Pilot-Officer Prune, bush hats with all manner of feathers and

^{*}See Note 10.

plumes in them like an angler, and sometimes surprisingly, as a concession to what, I think, was still supposed to be the official headgear, a battered and unrecognizable topee.

You would have said that all this betokened a sad lack of respect for an Air Chief Marshal, but the reverse is the case. The R.A.F. has a flair which the other services may recognize, but will not admit, for hiding a stern but flexible discipline behind a loose and comfortable exterior. Over and above this they were being inspected in the middle of their battlefield and during the middle of operations; each of these wild, almost ragged young men might in a few hours find himself sitting beside his wrecked aircraft in the Burma forests behind the enemy whom he had a short while before been bombing and machine-gunning; an enemy who executed many airmen prisoners, particularly if they happened to be officers. It is then that the kukris and jungle-knives go into action and they had to use the jungle-lore which men like Kingdom Ward, the naturalist, and forest officers like Braithwaite, have taught them. Many have hacked and stumbled their way back through the jungle in this way and by now they know the sort of clothes to fly in.

Before we left this strip I heard that the flight-commander who led the morning attack against targets in the enemy-held port of Akyab had been hit by flak in the middle of his dive and had blown up. It was their first casualty for months. I should have been with him if the timings had fitted in.

That night in the thatched mess back at Comilla the Canadian photographer Southward took some flashlight pictures of Sir Richard with Baldwin and Bill Williams at the simple dinner. These pictures are hanging in the Mess now. Some of them appeared in the Press at home.

Next day was even more interesting for me. We flew low over the Naga Hills up the slopes of green jungle and mountain to the lovely valley of Imphal. I was to know these hills and valleys well as the winter advanced. This was my first glimpse into the forbidden valley of Manipur, the central break in the jungle massif which separates India from Burma. We didn't know then that later in the year it was to become the stage for one of the most determined attempts yet made by the Japs to invade India and the giant sand-table on which one of the most interesting staff college exercises of a war which has produced them in profusion would be played—a tremendous Tactical Exercise with Troops and Every Other Damn Thing Available.

We slipped into the Manipur Valley through the little gap in the western wall. Later, this was to become the hole in the wall through which supplies for the garrison were brought into the fort. Below lay a miniature Kashmir, lush fields between the hills, and here and there a quiet-looking lake where you could almost feel the wild game swarming undisturbed in the rushes and the sedge. We landed at Palel, the southern extremity of the valley, where we had just built a brand-new concrete runway. Here were the Hurri-bomber squadrons which this year had replaced the hardworked but comparatively ineffective Blenheims. More young jungle-boys with wings drew up for the A.O.C.-in-C. Then we took off for Imphal, the diminutive capital of this miniature kingdom of the clouds, tin-roofed but with a vague and indefinable atmosphere of Burma with which in peace time it had formed India's only tangible land-link.

The senior officers had lunch with General Scoones, commanding the Fourth Corps, which was responsible for stopping up this gap in the mountain defences of India; it was the Peshawar of the North-Eastern Frontier and in the topsy-turvy way of this war had become far more important than the famous

military capital of the N.W.F.P. I wonder if Curzon and Kitchener ever heard of Imphal.

After lunch, before stepping into his aircraft, Sir Richard inspected 28 Squadron, one of the old regulars of India before the war. Now it was equipped with Hurricanes. From the distance I could recognize Mervyn's corduroy trousers, and sure enough when we came up to the line Mervyn Thomas, my old friend from Risalpur, was at the top of the line looking very bronzed and happy. As Sir Richard walked down the row I managed to have a word with him and heard that the shooting was excellent. He used to look for the duck in the lakes from his Hurricane as he came back from a sortie, then go out in a jeep and have a pot at the evening flight—usually with good results. He was, as the R.A.F. say, 'on the boat', and we pledged to meet in the Berkeley next time.

Next stop was one of the pleasantest airfields I have ever seen—on the flanks of the Assam Hills in among the tea gardens; it was a lay-back airfield for the dive-bombers. As we drove round the dispersals in and out of the tea bushes, the Australian Squadron-Leader Admin told me several amusing tales of the construction of this field. They had procured five elephants for pushing and pulling heavy loads. One of them, Dumbo, became a squadron pet; they fed him lovingly on bananas. Then one day the Japs came and dropped fragmentation bombs harmlessly on the runway. The only damage was a large piece of shrapnel which caught Dumbo on the backside. He was last seen careering down the runway followed into the jungle by his four brothers. Recently an airman had shot a python outside the sergeants' mess and a wild elephant had started to barge down the armoury before it was killed with an anti-tank rifle. But it was not as tough a spot as it might sound from these stories. The climate was good, the planters were the most hospitable of all Europeans in the country, and the surroundings were very beautiful. The morale was sky high, and when it was suggested that they might be getting Mosquitoes one day, nobody seemed to want to give up the Vengeance—not even for a Mosquito. You don't have to be in the R.A.F. to know what that means.

On 18th December, 1943, all the air forces operating in the Eastern marches of India were incorporated in one command which was to be known as the Eastern Air Command. It was to be a united American and British Air Force under the command of an American, General Stratemeyer, known to all as 'Strat'. This command was under the direct control of Sir Richard Peirse, who now became the Allied Air Commander-in-Chief of the Air Command, South East Asia—a mouthful but an effective one.

At last we had been set on the road to unity with the Americans; it was up to all of us to see that it would work. This was really momentous and filled me with joy. I remembered only too clearly that ridiculous embarrassment, what the Germans would call *Hemmung*, which, particularly in India, had previously kept us strangers, so that we had been almost like two separate forces doing totally unrelated jobs but finding ourselves by some odd quirk of Fate in the same town, and, hard as we might try, it had been very difficult to break through this barrier except among travelled and objective people on both sides. Now, in the same offices and in the same command, these things would have to change. They did.

The Eastern Air Command was to operate with four fused Anglo-American fighting forces as its components—the Third Tactical Air Force commanded by Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin; the Strategic Air Force under the American General, Howard G. Davidson; the Troop-Carrier Command under the

American Brigadier, John D. Old; and the Photo Recce Force under Wing-Commander Wise. The American Lightnings, Kittyhawks, Mustangs, and Tomahawks were incorporated into the Third T.A.F. with the light bombers. The American Heavies and our own Liberators and Wellingtons were absorbed into the Strategic Air Force. Each force had as its Deputy-Commander an American or an Englishman, depending on whether the Commander was English or American. Thus Air Commodore 'Tog' Mellersh was deputy of the Bomber Command and Group-Captain Donaldson of the Troop-Carriers. Bill Williams was deputy to Stratemeyer. As Peter Cheney would say, it was a sweet set-up. The winter campaign saw it working just as well as only Anglo-American enterprise can—when it gives itself the chance.

Just before leaving on the English trip Air Marshal Joubert sent for me and asked whether I knew of any air force officers who were experienced in Press work and who might be lifted into his Public Relations Organization. I mentioned Charles Gardner. And so it came that I wrote a D.O. letter to Charles—who was then on the staff of Air Marshal Lees in the Ceylon Group. I described to him in glowing terms the prospects of following the war in South East Asia with his typewriter, this time as an official rather than as a correspondent, which had been his rôle in France at the outbreak of the war. At the end of the letter I rather rashly included a pious hope in the vernacular: "I suppose you won't have any difficulty in flannelling the old man at the End of the Passage", which was the familiar and affectionate alias of Uncle Lees.

It appears that Charles, Air Marshal Joubert's proposal having appealed to him, formed up before his A.O.C. and asked for his release. Uncle Lees was not unfriendly but asked in what form the proposed change of employment had come. In sublime innocence, it must have been rather like Johnny Head in Air walking into the river, Charles piped up: "In a D.O. letter from Wing-Commander Russell, sir." Uncle Lees then asked to see the letter. Charles slowly realized he was one step over the edge and prevaricated, but the Air Marshal was adamant so that Charles was compelled to stammer out: "I'm afraid there was a colloquial reference to yourself in the letter, sir."

"I don't care whether he called me a bald-headed old bastard. I want to see that letter."

Happily for me the colloquial reference was not considered insubordinate and Charles was released to S.E.A.C. Public Relations. So began a happy partnership which crystallized in the famous 'Operations Doughnut' of which more later. The next step was England, and one of the busiest, happiest months of my life—such is the oddness of these times.

I just had time to see Charles for long enough to take him to Air Marshal Joubert before driving to Willingdon Air Port. He was, I imagine, to discuss his new job, having flown fifteen hundred miles from Ceylon for this interview. But I suppose it was too much to expect that the brilliant ex-Commander-in-Chief of Coastal Command would not talk shop with a Catalina pilot who had seen the Jap fleet and flown the Atlantic patrols under the Air Marshal's command. There followed a long and technical discussion about tides, buoys, islands, different kinds of searches, the Maldives and the Seychelles Islands, and the comparative abilities of the Jap and German U-Boat commanders, at the end of which Charles was accepted with enthusiasm as Deputy Director of Public Relations (Air) on S.E.A.C. staff.

I suppose it is because this sort of thing doesn't happen in France and Germany that they usually fail in their national crises, though it's difficult to see quite why.

CHAPTER XIV

HOMEWARD BOUND

I HAD MY Christmas pudding in the middle of the Persian Gulf. It was difficult to balance it on my knees in the tunnel behind the pilot's seat of an Empire Flying-Boat, but it tasted as good there as anywhere. Nothing could have been less like Christmas than the warm blue sea which stretched in all directions like a dancing floor of glass. I stared at it and thought what a vital empire highway was this sheet of blue and how close to it the Germans had come in the spring of 1941. It meant supplies to Russia, oil to the allies all over the place, a sea and skyway for all sorts of travellers and soldiers, and in its heart, where of old there were only pearl fisheries, now spurted the black life-blood of nations.

"Have some more brandy butter." Peter Wood, captain of Cooee, broke into my thoughts with a very seasonable suggestion. He was passing out a new captain on this trip, a young flight-lieutenant lent to B.O.A.C. by the R.A.F., so he could sit back a bit. The young flight-lieutenant ironed the big boat on to the water so smoothly there was little chance of his not passing out. I climbed down the ladder back into the saloon and sat down in my chair.

Most of the passengers were carefree young ferry-crews, sergeants and warrant officers, who had flown all manner of aircraft across the deserts of Transjordan and Iraq and down the dried-up coastline of Baluchistan to India. One of them, a fair-haired earnest youth, told me he had flown a Spitfire from the Middle East all the way to Allahabad in the centre of India. He had made seventeen intermediate landings before he reached his goal and then the under-carriage stuck. He had made a belly-landing, and stopped an undeserved rocket for his troubles—as if he wanted that to happen after bringing his precious wild bird through all that sand and loneliness.

Next to me sat a tall and very distinguished-looking Frenchman with beautiful English. He was reading *Madame Bovary*. We gossiped and I asked him about his blue uniform with a discreet pair of wings and a hat like the merchant navy. He belonged to the Atlantic Ferry, now part of the R.A.F. Transport Command, and his crew of five, all neatly dressed in navy blue like himself, and with their business-like little bags with the tools of their trade—the navigator his sextant and the engineer his tools—looked more like air-line crews in peace time, and were in strong contrast to the care-free gang of ferry-pilots. The French captain told me this was the second Liberator they had delivered to India in three months; before that he had been on the Pacific run; he told me in a matter-of-fact way of a flight in the Mitchell from California to the South West Pacific battlefield. Then he returned to Flaubert.

To port the low sandy coast swept in from the distance and we passed over the dhows and square mud houses of Bahrein. The sand tapered into the lagoon, at first yellow and emerald in the shadows, then a deep blue in the centre of the channel. Cooee banked over smooth and steep down wind; the tiny palm trees tilted up and revolved past the window. Then we straightened out, the flaps whined their way down and the young flight-lieutenant smoothed us on to the lagoon. We settled in a flurry of spray and then bobbed gently on the water, waiting for the launch.

That night, at Basra, the ferry-pilots slept in the comfort of the Shat-el-Arab hotel. On their next trip in some Hurricane they will have to find their own way back, sleeping in tents by the wayside—if they are lucky. This comfortable return trip—for which in peace time tycoons and statesmen played plenty—was a well-deserved perquisite of one of the least publicized, most uninspiring yet important jobs in the Air Force.

Next day we roared up the mud-brown Shat-el-Arab river, past the ships unloading supplies for Russia and over the narrow carpet of cultivation and palms which fringes each side of the river before the desert swallows up its greenness in a monochrome of dirty brown. At breakfast-time we landed easily on the generous expanse of the Lake at Habbaniyah. I looked at the plateau and at the airfield beneath where Dakotas and Liberators and aircraft of every kind were crowding the runways, many of them with the white star of Uncle Sam on their fuselage, and the Frenchman and I mused happily on the present, comparing it smugly with the past. From Murmansk to Morocco the allies were holding hands in a giant ring around the Germans and this airfield was in the middle of the ring. Before, it had been surrounded by hostility and weakness; a disaffecting Iraq, a German-dominated Iran, a German-occupied Syria, and forty-eight field-guns on the plateau which we could see a hundred yards away.

"*Ce fut raté de près*," murmured the Frenchman over his cup of hot tea.

I remembered another talk with a Frenchman over a cup of tea at an airfield. It was in April, 1939, at Budapest. We were flying from India to Amsterdam. He said of Chamberlain: "*Cet homme néfaste qui vous mènera au grand désastre*." He nearly had, but now, as the ring round Germany grew tighter, we could look with equanimity on the past and with satisfaction on the present, of which this airfield that had once been about the only outpost between the Germans and the head of the Persian Gulf—an outpost surrounded by a hostile army—was a striking example.

Out of our element—a huge flying-boat floating above the desert—we sailed 'down long savannahs of the blue', along the pipe-line in perfect weather. There was nothing to be seen save the thin line which carried the oil from Kirkuk to the Mediterranean. After three hours of motionless flight snow mountains to the north heralded the approach to Palestine. The effect was still as if we were flying over the ocean; it was heightened when the low outline of the Palestine hills slowly rose beneath us from the even floor of the desert. Then came that pleasant sensation, the descent into the depths of the Dead Sea. To-day it was a glorious sunny expanse sunk in the cliffs of this holy land, but in bad weather it must be like descending 'through caverns measureless to man, down to a sunless sea'. In fact, Coleridge might have been thinking of the Dead Sea when he wrote *Kubla Khan*. Lord Wavell says he once tried to draw a sketch map of Kubla Khan's pleasurehouse. I wonder whether he or the poet ever thought of this sunken sea where

*meandering with a mazy motion
through wood and dale the sacred river ran;
then reached the caverns measureless to man
and sank in tumult to a lifeless sea.*

We glided in over the trickle that was Jordan and sat down opposite a modern luxury hotel. It was my first breath of Europe since September, 1939, and

as I watched the Christmas holiday-makers from Jerusalem the war seemed farther away, not nearer.

In Cairo we parted company with the ferry-pilots, who scattered over the delta to pick up fresh reinforcements for Sir Richard Peirse. I said good-bye to the tall French pilot and his neat, well-humoured crew. He was the sort of Frenchman you might meet in peace time at St. Moritz or in a Paris *salon*, the man of action and the man of letters, not narrow or selfish like those who forgot the message of France in 1940. He was, you might say, the eternal Frenchman, the complete citizen, and now he was flying heavy aircraft across the widest spaces of the earth. I saw him later in London, at the R.A.C., and shall meet him probably in ten years' time—in the Louvre perhaps.

The next stage of the journey was with R.A.F. Transport Command, which is throwing its net over the battle-grounds of the world and running more numerous and regular flights than ever the air lines did in peace time—another portent of the future. We had a mixed bag in our Dakota belonging to the famous 216 Squadron as we took off in the middle of the night from the desert airport. There was a Brigadier from the 8th Army; a King's messenger complete with greyhound, astrakhan coat and backstage gossip of the Teheran Conference; a Polish officer in British uniform who had recently been inside Europe upsetting German plans in all manner of ways; a four-ring captain and two commanders, R.N.—one of them with the D.S.O.—and the other, Dimmock Watson, elder brother of a school friend. Our pilot was a young Polish flying-officer with the *Virtute Militari*. He found transport-flying flat after Bomber Command, as any Pole would. The flight was dull and eventless until we came in the afternoon to the Atlas mountains where banks of alto cumulus cut us off from the earth until we emerged over Oran and set course for Gibraltar. We landed just as it was getting dark, in the eddies and gusts which swirl round the rock and make landing so difficult there.

We had a whole day in this fortress, which has meant more in this war probably than in any other. A day in which the Polish captain spoke to me of Poland as only such patriots can. The problem of reconciling his people with Russia became suddenly of real importance to me that day, so near to the spot where his great leader, Sikorski, had been killed just when he was beginning to bring about a real improvement between the Governments of Russia and Poland. Europeans seem to hate each other more than the communities in India, which is so hard for the European exile to understand. It hit me forcibly on the first day of my return to Europe.

In the evening the Pole and I went to the Cathedral to hear Handel's *Messiah*. It was sung by a choir of servicemen and women, and the orchestra was conducted by an R.A.F. corporal. I have heard the *Messiah* at St. Paul's and at the Albert Hall, but nowhere more movingly sung than by these men and women of the army, navy, and air force in the Cathedral of Gibraltar. A Wren sang: 'I know that my Redeemer liveth', and the pure notes of this lovely aria rang out in the still air as a challenge to the forces of darkness across the barbed-wire fence a mile away, where Europe in Chains began.

In the morning I was home.

CHAPTER XV

LONDON AT WAR

I SAT IN a room at Air Ministry that first morning of my return and listened to all those noises which mean so much to the exile returned and so little to the man who has never been away. The chime of Big Ben itself and the rumble of the buses in Whitehall. At lunch-time I walked across the Park and paused on the bridge to watch the ducks. Across the iron railings of the little suspension bridge was the ruffled water, and beyond, the domes of the Admiralty like a drawing in a fairy-book. The other way was Buckingham Palace, from that view-point like a big Georgian country house in a winter park. I walked on to my club. It was good to be back in London, as all wandering Londoners well know. In that mood it was more colourful and exciting than all the sands and the lagoons and the jungles of the eastern world put together. Next door to the club a venerable palace in the Venetian style showed gaping walls and a grandiloquent double staircase on which obviously a thousand-kilo bomb had landed. In the haven of our smoking-room I still felt more secure and farther from the war than in any place I had been. I think after the war we should compel the Germans to play golf and teach them how to enjoy the solid comforts of a club.

I had a full and interesting time in London, for apart from my work I lived there and found surprisingly a number of old friends, some of them were working in Whitehall close by. Alan Houseman, who had joined the Cambridge Air Squadron with me in the prehistoric age when Bill Williams taught us how to fly in Avro 504's and Bristol Fighters. He now had his D.F.C. and was working in the Cabinet Offices just round the corner from me. Basil Barr had cleaned the floors of a barrack in Devizes until his legal qualifications had been discovered, and he was now one of the legal advisers to the Home Office just round the other corner.

After four years of war London was obviously different—on the surface. But there seemed little change of heart or of character. The plaster on the walls of our little Georgian house had crumbled and peeled, although my mother still managed to coax her bulbs into flower on the drawing-room balcony. The paint from the green door had gone in the second winter of the war. But inside everything seemed as neat and tidy as of old, despite the hard work required of older people—women—to keep it so. This was my impression of London in the fifth winter of the war, for the people were the same as the houses—tired and a little bored, but inside as tough and full of heart as ever.

In the course of my work I met a number of men and women at the B.B.C. including Mr. Foot, who was then Director-General and for whom I had brought a letter from Bryant in India. Norman Collins, controlling the Overseas Service, asked me to do a five-minute talk which would be broadcast in the Forces Favourites programme to the services in the Middle East and India. This is a first-class programme, very popular with the troops, in which they write in to Langham Place asking for their favourite record to be played. Marjorie Anderson and her partner, Betty MacLaughlin, then play it and say a little piece to the man concerned—it is excellent for morale. I have listened to the men at the receiving end in their basha huts and watched the happiness this programme gives, for it is put over by those efficient and charming girls

in a most competent manner. It was a pleasant experience, if a little disillusioning, to sit in the tiny box-like studio underneath the ground in the middle of London, surrounded by turn-tables and dials, where the programme was staged. It was far more romantic at the other end, and I told Marjorie Anderson as much, although not one of her listeners would have thought so.

I told the troops in India my immediate impressions of London.

I had gathered from my few minutes' talk with Mr. Foot that the Government was alive at last to the dangers of this overwhelming nostalgia among the troops in India. There was an attempt to utilize every means of publicity and amenity in a campaign directed at the men of the Forgotten Front. They were now to be made to feel that the people of England were as interested in them as in the Eighth Army and the Fifth Army. I must confess I found that most people in all walks of life were quite ready to be interested in a front which was as colourful and dramatic as the desert and the Tuscan hills, even if nothing very dramatic was happening there, provided they were told about it in language they could understand and by the men they trusted. The correspondents in India had done their best, but the Press at home, with restricted space, could rarely find the time and the room for news and views about Imphal and Arakan and Ledo when it meant displacing stories from Italy and North Africa, unless the names of the writers were big enough to make it worth their while. But now a start was made. The big names would follow after.

An important event was the announcement that the Fourteenth Army was in existence and that its commander was General Slim. This forgotten army had been forgotten as much because it had been nameless as because it was fighting on a front of unpronounceable names. Now it could fight under a style, like the other famous armies of the war. I think the morale of the army benefited more from this one factor than from all the Vera Lynns and Ensa parties which were to be sent there in small but increasing numbers.

It was at this precise moment, too, that we were given a welcome sign in London of the growing strength of the R.A.F. on that front. The presence of Spitfires in India was made known for the first time on the last day of the year. Those two squadrons which Sir Richard Peirse had visited only a fortnight before had given him and the Allies a magnificent New Year's present. The flock of fat Jap bombers had come as they expected, sailing in tight formation over the Mayu hills towards the port of Chittagong. The Spits had good warning and had torn into the formation with such fury and hitting power that they had brought down thirteen Japs from one formation, including a number of fighters. The battle and the announcement made a great impression in London. Attention was focused for a few moments on the rice-fields ten thousand miles away.

Roger Falk was taking part in this campaign in London against the Forgotten Front and he made use of this victory in his Saturday afternoon broadcast on the short wave to the troops in India, in which he told them of the effect it had achieved in the national Press. This weekly talk, in which he summarised the publicity the Fourteenth Army and the R.A.F. in India had achieved in the Press throughout the week had, I think, a tonic effect on morale, since the men could never know what happened to the stories written about them by the correspondents accredited to S.E.A.C. The correspondents themselves seldom knew.

One day when I was in Broadcasting House I met George Barnes, whom I had known many years ago as a child. He was controller of talks in the home service. After our meeting it was agreed that I should do a postscript to the

news, describing the Burma-Assam front and the way in which the R.A.F. work and live in India.

I was handed over to a charming and alarmingly intelligent girl who was given the job of drawing me out and making me tell my story. We talked for an hour on Indian politics, on which she was amazingly well informed. Then she wrote down in five minutes on the back of an envelope the headings of my talk and sent me away.

George held my hand when the time came. I had done some broadcasting in India, but there you have the comforting feeling that nobody is listening to you because scarcely anybody has a set. Here I was told the listeners ran into millions at this time, just after the news. Part of the talk was reprinted in the *Listener* with a picture of a bullock leaning up against a Wellington with a palm tree in the background. I had a number of letters from friends and relatives of airmen in India which was a new experience, although Roger, who did the same thing a few months before, had received a thousand letters and one proposal.

As a result of this broadcast Roger took me to see Mr. Amery, to whom somebody had mentioned it. We spent an interesting hour or so in Eaton Square, particularly interesting for me as I was able to talk to him about the I.A.F. He brought the matter up by asking if I knew any reason why so many of the first draft of Indian pupils who had gone to Canada as part of the Empire Air Training scheme had failed—most of a draft of twenty-five had been turned down. I said I was certain it was because in recruiting pilots for the I.A.F. we had now come to the bottom of the bucket. At the beginning of the war there had only been a limited number of young men, with good education and the character that comes from background and discipline, available and willing to join the services. There were probably many more who for political reasons were not willing to join up. Most of these young men had already joined the Indian Army, which had long traditions. What is more, the army had a first-class cadet college at Dehra Dun, a Sandhurst, where the budding officers learnt how to lead as well as how to fight. The trouble with the I.A.F. was really twofold, as I saw it—first, there weren't enough young men in the reservoir of young men; and, second, you must teach men to lead as well as to fly, if you want a good air force.

I then expanded on the vital need in India for an air force cadet college on the lines of Sandhurst, and in the middle of it suddenly became rather embarrassed when I realized I was talking to the Secretary of State. Perhaps, after the war, India will get her Cranwell and then the I.A.F. will have a real chance. To prove my point I mentioned to Mr. Amery that the present proven leaders of this new force were those who had been sent to the real Cranwell. Jumbo Mazumdar and Aspy Engineer—both Wing-Commanders and both with D.F.C.s—Meher Singh, who was soon to win the D.S.O., the first in the I.A.F., and Arjun Singh, who later won the D.F.C. twice in a few weeks had all been to Cranwell. We then got on to different subjects, the brilliance of Garvin, Mr. Amery's own days in India as a *Times* correspondent, and an old Speedwell print of Hindustan which I had picked up and had with me.

One of the joys of my sudden and unexpected return to England was meeting my youngest brother, who had spent over two years in Malta and had returned a few days before me. We went to Westminster Abbey one Sunday morning, although our family allegiance was to St. Paul's, where my grandfather had been a canon for over forty years and my uncle organist for nearly a decade. They were both buried in the crypt, and my first cousin, with whom

I had been brought up in the shadow of the cathedral, was commemorated on his father's tablet—he had been shot down on his first operation with a Blenheim Squadron in August, 1941. My aunt told me that there was no singing any more in the Cathedral and the Sunday service was held in the crypt accompanied by a grand piano. It sounded so drab that we went to the Abbey and were well rewarded. It was packed with young men and women from all the services, itself an unusual sight, and there was a feeling of self-dedication in the tense crowds which thronged the aisles and nave of the Abbey. The atmosphere of history, the tablets of so many of our great men and women within reach of an outstretched hand, the sweetness of the boys' voices and the swell of the organ were all powerful influences towards spiritual strength in these chaotic times. Many of the congregation would soon be losing their lives in the reconquest of Europe for its foolish peoples. It seemed a tragedy to me that St. Paul's, the other great parish church of the Empire, should be virtually closed to worship in these times of national crisis. My grandfather, old Canon Newbolt, would never have allowed it, nor, I think, Dean Inge. I wrote and told the present Dean as much.

One day Roger and I had lunch with Mr. Deakin, the foreign and imperial editor of the *Times*, at which two amusing stories were told about Wavell, before he left England to become Viceroy. Roger had been working in the India Office and had been in close touch with Wavell. The girls in his typing pool, who had done a lot of work for the Viceroy-designate before his departure to India, asked Roger whether they could say Good-bye and wish God-speed to the Field-Marshal. Roger asked Wavell, who agreed, and when the day came took him round the roomful of excited girls, introducing him to each in turn. At the beginning of the handshaking he had noticed one little girl at the end of the line who seemed more agitated than the occasion demanded, and when they came to her she burst out, her cheeks all red and embarrassed, but with great determination: "Excuse me, Lord Wavell, do please excuse me, but when you get to India please, oh please, don't let the India Office b——r you about." "Not on your sweet life, my dear," was the reply. And judging from the manner of the release of Gandhi in May this year it looks as if the Viceroy is following the little typist's advice. It is possible that the Indian problem might be three parts solved if all Viceroys would take her hint.

The other story was told by Mr. Deakin and concerned his own interview with Wavell before the latter flew to India. He asked Deakin whether he ever had anything to do with the choosing of 'Old and True' for the *Times*, those apt quotations which appear tucked away at the bottom of a page every day and which many follow as carefully as the leaders. Deakin said he occasionally was asked to advise on them. Then Wavell told him that he had found his own Old and True. He had been reading the Bible, the Book of Ezekiel. "I read a verse," he said, "'and ye shall sail into deep waters'. I immediately put my hand over the rest of the verse with a feeling that it contained a message for me. I lifted my hand and read on, 'and an East wind shall destroy thee'." So far there has been little sign of destruction, for Wavell promises to become one of the outstanding Viceroys of the century.

One morning during my stay in London I went into St. Paul's and it was just as I had imagined it. There were a handful of people under the dome wandering aimlessly in that enormous emptiness and here and there a forlorn verger. It reminded me of an empty house, and I fully expected to find dust-covers on the choir stalls. I went down to the crypt and stood in front of Grandpa's tablet. W. C. E. Newbolt had been one of the early adherents of Cardinal

Newman's Oxford Movement in the middle of the last century and had become one of the most famous Victorian preachers. He loved the cathedral and would have been sad and angry, I thought, at the emptiness and uselessness of this great church in these times when it was more than ever needed by the people.

Then I stood beside the grave of my uncle, Charles Macpherson, organist from 1916 to 1926, one of the best players of Bach in his time and the composer of many anthems and chants which are sung in the churches of Britain. Alasdair, my cousin, had been my boyhood companion. His name was inscribed beneath his father's on the stone flag. His scholarship and physical courage were matched, as they so often are in men of intellect. At the age of twenty-eight he was professor-designate of Theology at Macgill University. He had been due to sail on 3rd September, 1939. Instead, he joined the Air Force as an observer and was killed on his first operation in one of those daylight shipping strikes in the Channel which cost the light-bomber Group under Air Vice-Marshal Stephenson so many Blenheim crews in 1940 and 1941: crews whose courage has been sung by Anthony Richardson:

*But six came home. . . . Before the sun
Arose to break a day begun,
Twelve took off! The clock struck three
As they crossed the grey North Sea.
Death would heed no orison!
Men and sheep, whose story's spun,
On a tree nailed the One
Who must pay the penalty.
Thus it was and e'er will be.
He may read as who may run
But—six came home!*

I gossiped with Old Tanner, the head verger, who had chased Alasdair and myself off the roof and other forbidden places times without number. It was pleasant to hear him say things had been different in Grandpa's day.

One of my pleasantest memories of London was Albany. Charles Adams, the secretary, has been an honorary uncle since I can remember. He was a loyal adherent of St. Paul's and travelled to Ludgate Hill from far Piccadilly every Sunday in the old days to hear Uncle Charles' voluntaries. We used to sing together in the big choir on the feast days. Charles and his chambers in Albany are a living part of the London that never dies, the London of the Georges and the Regency. After my postscript to the news, Gilbert, my brother, and I had dinner in his chambers under the Italian ceiling and with candles set in silver candlesticks the as only illumination. Outside was the quiet stillness of the rope-walk. Over a well-warmed bottle of Château Lafitte we talked of St. Paul's, and he, too, was sad at the present state of things. He never made the journey now from Melbourne House to St. Paul's Churchyard.

Charles loved to talk of the Albany and of the famous inhabitants from Lytton and Byron and Gladstone to Priestley and G. B. Stern, from the times when Lady Caroline Lamb used to dress up as a boy and climb into Byron's chambers to the Burlington bomb which crashed into the north end of the arcade next door and drove Clifford Bax from his first-floor suite looking into Vigo Street over the Bodley Head. There is nothing in Berlin or Munich or Hamburg to match up with this continuity of national life—there the past is dead and you can only see it by paying fifty pfennigs at the door of a museum,

and even then *das Betreten is verboten*. In London it lives into the present and will continue into the future.

My time in London quickly drew to a close and I returned by air to India with instructions to visit Algiers and Italy on the way.

.

The engines throbbed evenly in the darkness of the Atlantic night. We sat huddled up for warmth in our chairs, trying to sleep, but it was cold and confined, like being in a dark tunnel at the fair which moves up and down under your feet. We were somewhere off the French coast I judged and there was a long way to go yet. Well after midnight the second pilot came back and said to me:

"There may be some Jerry night-fighters after us; will you get the passengers to put on their life-jackets?"

Then followed five minutes of struggling in the dark tunnel to pull our chairs apart and wrap the life-jackets around us. We subsided again in our chairs and tried to think of nothing in particular. This was difficult. Then, after what seemed a long time, the second pilot came back and said whatever danger there had been was past. It appeared there had been a series of flares dropped in a lane a mile or so behind us. Then the flares had gone out and we had sailed on in the blackness. I got up from the chair as a chink of grey light showed through the curtains and went forward. What a glorious sight was spread out before the broad window of the Dakota cockpit! We were cruising up the Straits of Gibraltar with the sun rising behind the rock twenty miles ahead. Below, a destroyer was plugging up the Straits; to port the Spanish coast stretched eastwards all friendly and welcome like the morning.

Breakfast at Gib. was a terrific meal.

We flew across to the African Coast and followed it down past Oran at five hundred feet all the way in perfect weather. The navigator let me take a sunsight and I think he was as surprised as I to find it was quite a good one. On the way from England I had been reading Tom Wisdom's book, *Triumph in Tunisia*, the first three copies of which I was bringing to him in Cairo, where he was senior R.A.F. Public Relations Officer. It was interesting reading of the capture of Maison Blanche, the vitally important airfield at Algiers, on D Day by a handful of R.A.F. officers who had boarded the Air France bus to the airport and concluded an amicable informal treaty with the French Air Force for its use during those tremendously important first few days. The R.A.F. P.R. villa on the top of the hill at Algiers sounded very pleasant and I looked forward to staying there. Tom Wisdom had occupied it at the very beginning of the campaign and it was known, I heard afterwards, as Wisdom's folly, but my experience of follies is that they are usually excellent things of which those who have had no part in their birth are jealous and so try to laugh them out of court. The villa at Algiers was an excellent thing, as I was soon to find out.

The hills flattened out into rolling country, neat vineyards and farms filled the landscape. In a short while we had landed at Maison Blanche, where Dakotas were taking off and landing like trains at Waterloo.

The villa more than lived up to the expectations raised by Tom Wisdom in his book. It had belonged, I believe, to an Englishwoman who had left it when the Germans dropped an unexploded bomb in the garden. It stood in a delightful garden with cyprus trees and bougainvillea and poppies and wild roses, an extraordinary mixture of colour and families both tropical and temperate. Inside it rambled about on different levels as houses built on

hillsides always do. It had iron grill gates and small ogival doorways in white-washed walls. Its only blot was the plumbing, which in summer must have been overwhelming.

I drank quantities of 'screech', the vernacular name for the red Algerian wine, which I enjoyed more than the R.A.F.P.R. officers who had been in Algiers for more than a year now and had grown accustomed to the French atmosphere of the place, an atmosphere which I had not known since the far-away summer of 1939.

Tom Guthrie, who was in charge of R.A.F. Public Relations in North Africa and had just been made a Wing-Commander, took me down to the office in the Agricultural Building where the P.R. organization of all the services and of the Americans were housed together. This was obviously a very good thing. Communications, which is the basis of good P.R., were also excellent and I was amazed at the multiplicity of high-speed transmitters, mostly supplied by the R.A.F. and the Americans. It had taken time to build this intricate and efficient system up, but it was functioning perfectly at that time. The trouble with war is that when it moves it moves damn fast, and the problem of communications starts all over again for the correspondents. In the starting again process the P.R.O.s are usually blamed for all manner of shortcomings by the correspondents—until they can get the communications and the censorship working smoothly and quickly once more.

There were a number of correspondents at the morning conference, but the only one I knew was Sonia Tomara of the *New York Herald Tribune*, an indefatigable and courageous woman correspondent who was furious with her office for keeping her in Algiers. She was aching to get to the front at Cassino. In India and in China she had flown with the Tenth Air Force on a number of missions, although her paper was opposed to her taking these risks.

During the conference I was amused to watch the high-speed competition between the two big American news agencies, the Associated Press and the United Press. The two agency men sat next to the door at the back of the conference room, and when the *communiqué* was read out they dashed off the first few sentences on their machines, tore off the slip from the roller and pressed it into the hands of a little boy who was standing in the passage outside and who stretched a grubby fist through into the room at the right moment. He then dashed down to the end of the passage and handed the flash into the telegraph office. In five minutes or less it was in America, often before the *communiqué* had been finished. I had seen this competition in India, but never quite so noticeably. Once an irate A.P. man whose message had been temporarily held up in censorship, thus giving a more harmless message from his U.P. competitor a beat, had stormed into my office and said:

"Since when has King George been rooting for the U.P.?"

Then there was the delightful story told me by Philip Wynter, the Australia correspondent, which he avers took place in the S.W. Pacific when the A.P. correspondent was wounded in battle and wrote a hair-raising story about it to his head office in Washington, resulting in the U.P. man getting a wire from his head office: *A.P. man wounded why you still unhurt?*

Looking at the sweep of Algiers bay and the prosperous modern air of its villas and hotels and offices climbing up the hill, it seemed to me to be one of the luckiest towns of the war. It was living in comparative ease and security, the fruits of complete lack of principle, of having a cake and eating it, of running with Vichy and only very mildly hunting with the Allies. But it certainly is a

beautiful place, and so it is fortunate that it has been spared real bombardment and destruction.

I flew to Naples in a Dakota of R.A.F. Transport Command, one of only three transport aircraft which took off that day from Maison Blanche—the other two were also R.A.F. aircraft.

The ceiling was down to three hundred feet and it was impossible to see across the airfield. Numbers of passengers for other destinations stood cold and stranded in between the two gaunt French hangars where the Americans and our own A.D.R.U. have their offices. We climbed into the 'hard-seat' Dakota with some trepidat but our crew of three took off with the utmost confidence and climbed through the overcast in a few moments to the warm sun above.

We never saw the sea once during the whole passage, only a sea of white cumulus cloud. Once a mountain in Sicily poked an enquiring pinnacle through the floor of cotton wool on which we were riding, and when we approached Naples the mountains and the islands reared up through the clouds with Vesuvius a useful beacon to the airfield. It was remarkable the ease and confidence with which this transport crew went firmly down into the base of the cloud, which was no more than a hundred and fifty feet over the ground, and emerged right over the runway where we rolled past scores of Spitfires and Mustangs and Lightnings parked along each side of the strip. The weather was so bad that nobody was expecting us, and it was late in the afternoon by the time I had reached the centre of Naples and contacted Andrew Rice, who was in charge of the R.A.F.P.R. unit in Italy.

On the way to the P.R. villa—another comfortable house on the bay taken over from a fat Italian banker—we passed the rows of bombed-out houses along the waterfront. Naples looked dirtier and more unhealthy than many of the congested bazaar towns of India, and the people in the streets were filthy and tattered beyond description.

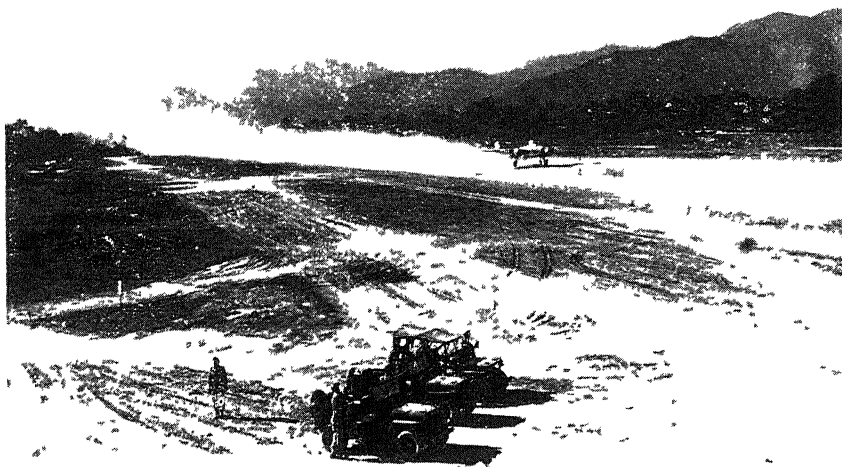
I spent one night in the R.A.F. villa. It was a gay and amusing evening, for Andrew Rice is a witty and kindly host. He was the first P.R. officer to set foot on the beaches of North Africa on D Day, and the story of his landing and meeting with an Arab family on the beach is one of the most amusing parts of Tom Wisdom's book. There were a number of correspondents in the villa and after dinner they spoke of their visit of the previous day to the Nettuno beach-head.

The landing at the beach-head had only taken place four days before and the opposition had been negligible. Obviously the plan, which was a brilliant one, had been beautifully timed just after the three Panzer divisions had been committed to the Fifth Army front. But the correspondents were all beginning to get anxious as to whether we were exploiting our surprise and advantage as quickly as we should. Several of them had been taken into the beach-head by Rex Barley, the adjutant at Algiers. They had driven in a jeep along the Appian Way to the fifty-seven kilometre stone from Rome and had only been stopped by a detachment of our own troops who themselves had not yet contacted the Germans. They seemed to think that Rome lay wide open, if we could take a risk and rush a mobile brigade into the town.

It was in this villa that Micky Salzer, the naturalized Austrian flight-lieutenant, who was first R.A.F. officer into Sicily and Salerno and Naples, played me on his portable gramophone the nostalgic song of Rommel's Africa Corps, *Lili Marlene*. This tune had become so familiar in the desert and had such a lilt that it was taken over by the Eighth Army and the Desert Air Force.

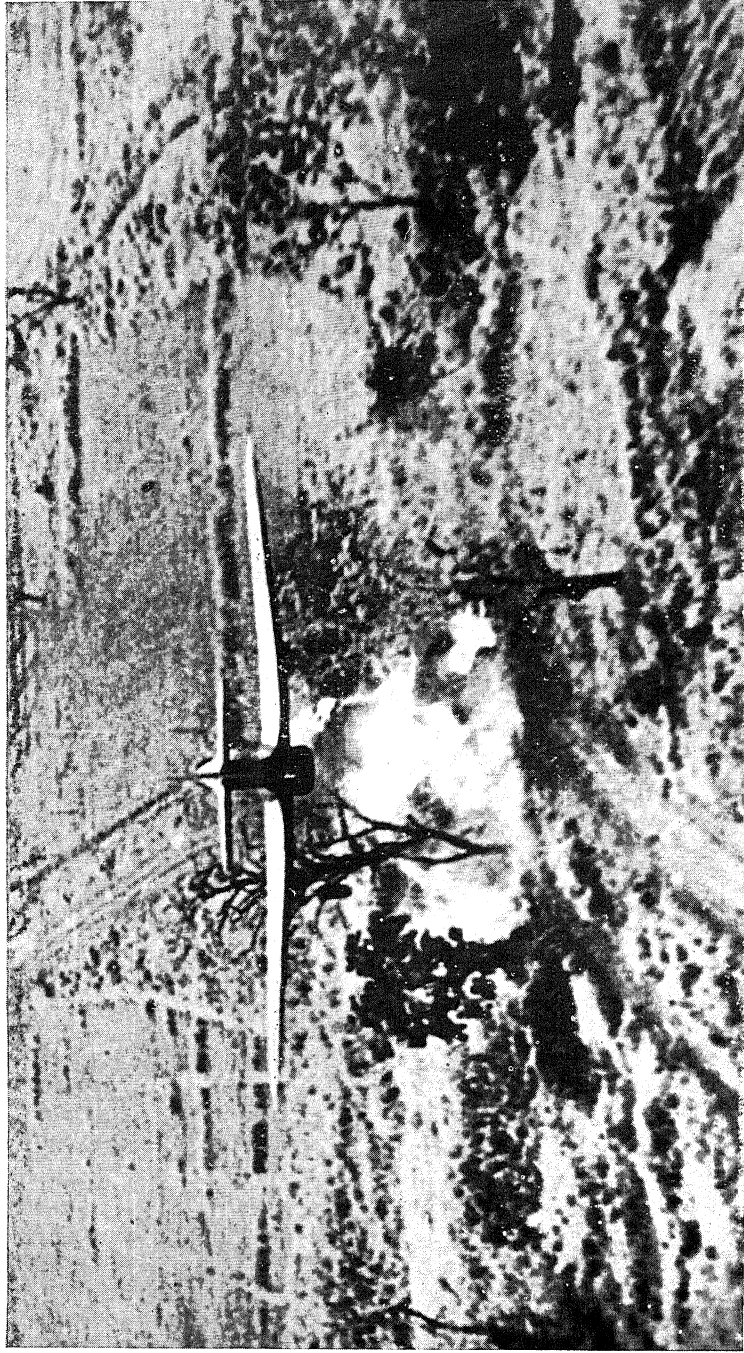


AN AUSTER LIGHT AIRCRAFT LANDING ON A STRIP BESIDE THE SHWELI RIVER
IN CENTRAL BURMA



A STRIP AT IMPHAL FROM WHICH AN AMERICAN MITCHELL LIGHT BOMBER IS
TAKING OFF

It was in a similar type of aircraft that General Wingate was killed while flying
from Imphal to India.



A HURRICANE FIGHTER-BOMBER COMES IN LOW TO ATTACK A BRIDGE ON THE TIDDIM ROAD

The bridge has been squarely hit by another pilot just ahead. Two bombs can just be seen falling away from under the wings.

Many squadrons, I was told, had made up their own versions of the words. Only the Yugoslavs hated it, for, Micky said, the Germans played it while they were shooting the patriots. In the big Naples night club it was received with acclaim by American and British officers where, only a few weeks before, the Germans had been applauding it from the same band and the same cabaret. Micky knew Europe inside out and had already marked down the next R.A.F. villa on a tourist map of Rome. He asked me a lot of questions about India and Burma and was keen to come out to our front. He was the only P.R. officer I met in Europe who was.

The next day, John Redfern, of the *Daily Express*, drove right across Italy with me to the Eighth Army front. I was amazed at the general air of poverty in the villages, most of which had not been touched by war. As we drove slowly through one dirty village street we were stuck behind an Italian lorry. A peasant in the back calmly unbuttoned himself in front of us and anybody who might be interested in the street. In India, which is held up so often as a country devoid of sanitary habits and facilities, you would never see anything so primitive as this.

On the way across the rolling hills of central Italy we passed the 4th Indian Division going the other way to the Fifth Army Front. For a moment their long and distinguished connection with the Eighth Army was being broken. As I watched those lorries passing with their load of Sikhs and Rajputs, Gurkhas and Mahrattas, strong and seasoned men, intelligent and confident in themselves, I felt as proud of them as if they were my own people. If only the Hindu politicians could allow themselves to be sufficiently human to feel what I, a stranger, could feel for their compatriots, that Indian unity about which they talk and write so much would become real and tangible. After that, independence in some form or other would soon be forthcoming.

We picnicked by a stream and Redfern asked me about the Hindu and Mahomedan religions. For someone who had never been to India he was very well informed. Two old ladies passed on foot—they had walked from France in some mysterious way and sold us some sweets, overjoyed to talk French in that unfriendly land. It's funny how the only thing in common fundamentally between the Germans and the French is a mutual contempt for the Italians.

In the afternoon we came to the great plains of Foggia where our bombers were already taking off over the dull regimented little farmhouses of Fascism, spread like dirty boxes all the same size along the main road. In their fields there were now Bostons and Hudsons and Wellingtons and scores of Spits churning up the lovely fields Mussolini had lost for them.

We refuelled in Foggia and drove up the coastal road in the wake of the triumphant Eighth Army, reaching Vasto in darkness. Here again the R.A.F. P.R. boys had installed themselves in a villa on the hill overlooking the sweep of Trigno bay and the hazy blue of the Adriatic. David Kark heroically shared his tiny office bedroom with me and in the morning sent me out on a wonderful expedition up to the Eighth Army line with Denis Johnstone, the Irish playwright and B.B.C. reporter. An army conducting-officer also came with us.

It was a perfect day and Denis Johnstone proved to be an excellent guide, as he had followed the whole campaign on this side of Italy since the beginning and knew all there was to know about the units and the battles that had been fought. When we came to the River Sangro we halted on the southern escarpment and looked across the wide valley, through which the river flowed so peacefully now, to the far side where the road wound up the northern cliff

two miles away. Along this ridge the Germans had waited for the Eighth Army with artillery and tanks—it was a magnificent defensive position several miles in length, commanding the whole valley across which the Eighth Army had to advance. It was also Montgomery's last battle in Italy in command of the crusaders. He had defeated the Germans in this action with his customary speed and skill. We drove over to the ruined farmhouse which stood on the far ridge and from which the German C.O. had directed the defence. On this escarpment in the tangled garden we looked back over the Sangro river and the valley, the view which the Germans had seen during the battle and across which the Indians and the Fusiliers had stormed not two months earlier. Denis Johnstone described the battle and told us the story of the German Colonel who had blockaded himself in the tunnels under the garden of his H.Q.

When the building had been captured an opening had been found to a system of catacombs beneath, and a sergeant was sent down the tunnel to round up any Germans who might have taken refuge there. When he entered the tunnel a fusillade of shots rang out and he was pulled out dead. It was decided there must be at least a platoon of Germans in the tunnel, so the entrance was sealed up and they were left to suffocate. A fortnight later the tunnel was opened up and in the middle of the catacombs in a large room, which must have served as a mess or headquarters, was a solitary German colonel sitting upright in full uniform at a table, the revolver with which he had shot himself on the table in front of him.

We motored along the lateral road which ran east and west along the escarpment, and along which the Germans had moved their tanks in a vain effort to stop the British and Indian troops once they had fought their way up the ridge. At the western end of the road, opposite the Eighth Army left flank, was the hamlet of Fossachesia where our attack on the ridge had been strongly contested by the Germans. They had held us up for a long time with a flame-thrower mounted on a tank, and until this had been knocked out it had been impossible to occupy the village and gain the ridge. The black hulk of the flame-throwing monster was still blocking the tiny square. Behind it was the ruined church and in front a fresh graveyard with the names of the gallant fusiliers who had fallen in knocking out the flame-thrower. Both the machine and the men, dead in the square, seemed to watch us as we picked our way through the ruins on that peaceful, sunny, winter morning.

Up the road from Fossachesia there were some derelict German tanks, and by the side of the road a metal strip about a hundred and fifty yards long where the light American Austers and L5's were landing. I was to see many more of these in the Burma forests before very long. Then we came to the village of Casoli, a Walt Disney affair perched on top of a steep hill in front of the high snow mountains. On the very top was a church. You could look down from the cobbled streets, through the binoculars of a Bofors' crew, and watch the Germans on the far side of the stream. In the intelligence officers' room we heard about the English officer who was leading the Italian guerillas in these mountains and playing hell with the Germans behind their own lines. The Germans had destroyed the local villages to deprive us of winter quarters, and the Italians fought well in British battle-dress to get back to their homes and avenge themselves. Many of our prisoners had been guided over the high passes in midwinter by the *montagnards* of these villages. While we were still in the room news came that the English leader of these guerillas had been betrayed into an ambush and killed.

Back at Vasto that night we went to an Ensa show in the gaudy municipal

theatre—Leslie Henson and Hermione Baddeley—and next morning I was being bumped along the beach at Trigno to the long metal strip where a South African Spitfire squadron was operating and where Transport Command landed on the daily milk-run with the Eighth Army News printed in Bari. I caught this aircraft for Naples and never had a worse trip in any aeroplane anywhere. It was damnably cold and we flew through the mountains in and out of the valleys. The clouds were well below the hills and it was rougher than any ship could be. We were hurled about and once or twice the aircraft felt like turning over. At Naples I had a cup of tea with the pilot and he admitted it had been about his worst trip, but they had to do it every day and the weather in Italy according to him was bloody. The trip back to Maison Blanche was anything but fair—it was a picnic to the Trigno-Naples effort.

The rest of the trip back to India was uneventful, though how I managed to get out an enormous roll of giant enlargements of bomb damage to German towns mystified more people than myself. On the following aircraft I had a Juke* box kindly given to me by a section of P.R. in Air Ministry for Sir Richard Peirse. But more important than any of these tangible assets were the invisible imports of skilled bodies which the Director of Public Relations at Air Ministry had promised to send out by air to India, including photographers, a film unit, and experienced P.R.O.s. He had even inveigled Andrew Rice into coming out from Italy. The journey had been well worth while from every point of view. Unlike so many Englishmen arriving in India, when the beach at Sandspits slid underneath us and the huddled bazaars of Karachi came into view under our port wing, I was happy. India is an exciting place, if you know how.

CHAPTER XVI

A BOX IN ARAKAN

I ARRIVED BACK in India just in time for the opening of the 1944 winter campaign. This time it was the Japs who started the offensive. It was a sign of weakness; at last they clearly had realized that if they did not invade India this season they would never have another chance. They probably also felt that Lord Louis Mountbatten would launch an immediate offensive against Burma, and that offence being the best form of defence they had better attack in strength, and quickly. Whichever way you look at it their offensive was a sign of weakness; and so it has proved.

If you can imagine the Burma-India frontier in all its length stretching from Ledo in the north-east to Akyab in the south-west—a long diagonal line—and the Jap as a boxer facing that line with his head and shoulders facing Imphal and his belt opposite Akyab, you would get a good idea of the disposition of his forces and the way in which he intended to use them. In the north he had three divisions massed on the east bank of the Chindwin opposite Tamu, where we had built a strip for aircraft. Here he was ready to swing his right to our jaw in the Imphal plain, and then, should he wish, abandoning

* See Note II.

boxing for jiu-jitsu, put a stranglehold on our communications which, by the unhappy distribution of the local geography, were extremely exposed in that area. There was the road from Imphal due north through Kohima to Dimapur down in the Assam plain, the only link by land with India from Imphal, save for the tenuous mountain track through Bishenpur to Silchar. Through Dimapur also ran the railway from Calcutta to the north-east corner of Assam, on which General Stilwell's supplies were carried to the northern gate in the mountain frontier which he was sapping and mining so effectively.

In the south-west, opposite the bottom gate into India, the Jap was ready to swing a vicious left jab, a body punch at our line in the Arakan. If he could wind us sufficiently here he might be able to push a couple of divisions through the wicket-gate of Arakan and seize the vital port of Chittagong before we could get our breath back.

This was the position at the beginning of February—the Jap on his toes pulling on his gloves, ready to strike with his right in the north or his left in the south. He had brought up reinforcements of aircraft, chiefly fighters, and they were so disposed that it looked as if he intended to start with his left hook in the Arakan.

What of the Fourteenth Army? These moves on the part of the Japs had been watched and appreciated, especially by Wingate, who, in conjunction with Stilwell, was preparing a revolutionary campaign in the central sector of the front. The decision of the Japs to go for the south first was obviously welcome to him, as it meant that there would be no interference with the mounting of his complicated and technically elaborate offensive, while the odds were that if we held the Japs in the south we should then be able to leap-frog over their divisions in the Imphal sector and take the initiative from them. So Wingate and Cochrane went on assembling their gliders and light aircraft and transports and the vastly greater numbers of trained Chindit jungle fighters undisturbed and totally unsuspected by the unimaginative and arrogant Japanese.

On 7th February, Tanabashi, the commander in the Akyab sector, swung his vicious jab at the body of our line in the south, which consisted of the 5th, 7th, and 26th Indian Divisions and the 81st West African in Kaladan. Several *Hikosentai* of fighter aircraft were sent in wedges over the battlefield with orders, copies of which were captured, to gain complete superiority over the battlefield. The Japanese infantry were given eight days' rations and ordered to strike on each side of the Mayu hills which run down the Arakan peninsular. The troops east of the range were ordered to isolate the divisions on that side by cutting the vital and unpronounceable Ngakyedauk Pass, which was a track over the hills connecting the 5th and 7th Indians Divisions with their lines of communication on the coastal belt. The Japs were cocksure that, as had happened so often when they had cut us off from our lines of communication, we should panic and probably surrender. The troops on the left flank by the sea would then be joined by the victorious units on the right and together they would roll us up along the coast and walk into Chittagong. Then, in all probability, the Japs had planned to hit out with their right in Imphal, hoping to force their way into Upper Assam, cut off Stilwell and sweep down into a liberated Bengal where they would join up with the triumphant southern divisions before the suburbs of Calcutta. It was a grandiose and boastful plan, but something on these lines was probably in their minds; so certain were they of its success they made no arrangements for feeding their troops after the eighth day.

At the start everything seemed to go all right. They surrounded the 7th Indian Division under Major-General Briggs. Major-General Messervy was nearly captured with his staff, but, as on previous occasions, he got away all right, this time in his pyjamas. But there was a big difference from the past. The British and Indian soldiers knew that being surrounded and apparently cut off meant nothing if you had air power and air superiority. In this short and trying battle they learnt to be cut-off and to like it. They were to spend large periods of this winter being cut-off and living as well as ever they had done at any time in the war.

To start with, things didn't go so well for us. The 7th Division was surrounded and separated into boxes, many of them with considerable numbers of administrative personnel inside them. It was essential if the Jap plan was not to succeed that these boxes should be supplied with rations and ammunition from the air. The newly-formed Troop-Carrier Command, which consisted of American and R.A.F. Dakota and Commando squadrons under the command of the American General, William D. Old, made its debut at this critical moment. It was a strong card which we possessed and the enemy did not; we were to play it over and over again during the campaign, but this was the first occasion it had been tried on a large scale anywhere in this theatre, and so far as we knew anywhere in the war.

At first things did not go well. They seldom do. The Dakotas were virtually unarmed—there were two Browning .303 machine-guns poking out of the rear-windows, one on each side, and they had to circle round slowly for some fifteen minutes or more while they were getting rid of their parachutes over the invested boxes. Moreover, at the onset of the battle our fighters had not yet completely cleared the sky of the Jap army fighters. In the first wave one R.A.F. Dakota was shot down over the dropping zone. The rest were turned back by Jap fighters. The situation was nasty, as the surrounded troops simply had to be provisioned. It was at this moment that General Old stepped into the breach with that gallantry which was to mark his leadership of the Troop-Carriers throughout the campaign. He flew his own Dakota at the head of the next wave and forced his way through to the Ngakyedauk Pass by sheer determination and courage. The other Dakotas followed him and not a single one was lost. It was from this moment that the outcome of the battle was decided, indeed, the outcome of the campaign.

The troops on the ground were fighting magnificently, and now that it seemed certain they could rely on always getting rations and ammunition from the air, it was merely a question of hanging on, killing as many Japs as possible and waiting for the inevitable—the starvation of the Japs and their surrender through inability to get ammunition and food. This might take time, but the conclusion was inevitable. It was to be the pattern for the whole winter's fighting.

Another important factor was the rapid air superiority which the Third T.A.F. established over the battle area after the first three days. Dickie Dickson, my Squadron-Leader with the Third T.A.F., followed the fighting in the air from the forward airfields and sent in numbers of stories in which the pilots of the Spitfire and Hurricane squadrons said that the Jap fighters flew aimlessly over the battle area in large formations trying to carry out to the letter their instructions to gain an air superiority which they had foolishly surrendered to us fourteen months earlier and without which their commander knew their troops on the ground could not operate successfully. They scarcely used any bombers in the fight in support of their troops, and the fighters were

not numerous enough or skilful enough to keep off our Dakotas and the amazingly useful Vengeance dive-bombers. The fighters of the R.A.F. and the Americans had no difficulty in driving them away within three days of the opening of the offensive.

After eight days the tide began to turn. Jap prisoners were taken without food and ammunition and, what was worse from their point of view, without orders what to do if anything went wrong with their plans. Such was their arrogance throughout the winter. On this will turn their downfall. After a fortnight we went on to the offensive and started to capture and kill large numbers of starving and useless Japs. British tanks went into action in this hill and jungle country and confounded critics by developing tactics which suited them and were invaluable in blasting the little men out of their bunkers and dug-outs. The Ngakyedauk Pass was cleared of Japs by the end of February and complete freedom for movement was restored to the 7th Division. The Jap plan had failed utterly, and it was clear that our army had learnt one of the most important lessons of jungle warfare—that in this fighting, armies are like islands in a sea of jungle and they are supplied by the ships of the air; if you have command of the skyways it is money for old rope, as they say.

Another interesting feature of this battle was the application on a small scale of Wingate's idea for the rescue of wounded men. A squadron of light aircraft, mostly American, with a few Moths flown by American and R.A.F. pilots, flew into boxes on to hundred-yard clearings, many of which were within rifle-shot range of the Japs. They picked up the wounded and flew them over the tree-tops to the large airfields in the rear. The Japs literally saw men taken from beneath their noses and flown to safety. Such is the influence of air superiority. In this battle more than three thousand Japanese were killed. This was a large number, and more than the total number of Wingate's phantom army which had penetrated beyond the Irrawaddy in the previous year and had suffered comparatively few casualties. It looked as if we were getting the hang of this jungle business and that the Japs were losing their skill, due largely to their unshakable confidence in themselves and a consequent rigidity in their tactics and outlook.

An interesting situation now developed as a result of this defensive victory. The Japs had been held in the south. Their body-punch had been parried and they had taken a hefty welt in their own midriff which had thrown them off their balance. Would they continue with the other part of their plan in the north or call it off? For a few days nobody knew, but Wingate was taking no chances. Knowing the Jap mentality he was pretty certain they would make their attack against the Imphal Valley regardless of the failure in Arakan, and he was determined to strike first. His plans and those of Colonel Philip Cochrane were nearing completion at their secret bases in Assam. In a few days they would be ready to launch one of the most extraordinary attacks of the whole war in any theatre.

I arrived back in Delhi just in time for the concluding phase of the battle of the Ngakyedauk Pass and the discomfiture of Tanabashi. Joubert was in full swing in his new job. He had collected a number of good men from England and America, who were looking at each other like new boys on the first day of school wondering what the term would bring forth.

The most arresting personality in the new combined P.R. outfit was undoubtedly Colonel Jim Bellah, who looked like a character from a Jack London

novel in his rugged six-foot-five of America. He looked perpetually puzzled, as if India was just so goddam crazy it couldn't be real. The first thing I ever heard him say was:

"Who ever heard of a country with square money?" He had a big reputation, I believe, in the States as a novelist, but I have not read any of his books. He was miserable in the office and Joubert sent him up to the Wingate base, where he went in with the first glider and wrote a feature story dripping with atmosphere which must have hit the front pages of the American Press with an enormous splash.

Another delightful American personality was Major Irving Asher, head of the Mountbatten film outfit. He had flown all his boys from America and at this time they were sitting in an office waiting for their equipment. They were miserable. Their combined weekly salary in the States—there were about half a dozen—ran into thousands of dollars. Their pay as enlisted men was probably in the hundreds. But this was nothing to them. The trouble was they had nothing to do.

Irving, broad and charming, liked England and was a fervent admirer of the Supremo. He took Alex Bruce, the Army film chief, and myself to see Mountbatten soon after he arrived, to emphasize our unity and discuss our problems, mainly of the shortage of equipment. It was from Irving I first realized the operational importance of films in the eyes of the Supremo. In England Irving had taken films of combined ops exercises which had helped Mountbatten to prove various apparently revolutionary proposals.

Other amusing and skilled henchmen were George Oppenheimer, perpetually philosophical and witty in the hottest of heat, and Otto Ludwig, a gay and professional cutter. The sad thing was that when the campaign started there was scarcely a camera to crank, a foot of film to cut, and so for George and Otto, the writer and cutter, very little to do. Sadly we were in the same boat, so that much of the magnificent work of the Troop-Carriers went unrecorded in film. General Stilwell, on the other hand, was liberally equipped with every form of still and movie apparatus. I never could understand the supply position in this theatre for this type of equipment.

My opposite number in the American Air Force, General Stratemeyer's senior P.R.O., was Mac Mackelway, ex-managing editor of the *New Yorker*. We came to know each other well, I think, despite many arguments and his refusal to admit that the British Empire came into existence in a fit of absent-mindedness.

Among the Englishmen there was first and foremost Frank Owen—hard-hitting editor of the *Evening Standard*—whom the Supremo succeeded in persuading that editing the Fourteenth Army paper *Seac* was more important than going into the army. I still don't know whether he is in the army or not. When he first arrived in India he wore alternately civilian clothes and Second Lieutenant uniform, and questions were asked by right-wing Conservatives in the House as to why he was a Brigadier. Mr. Amery had asked me in London what he was, and I was able to provide first-hand information to the Secretary of State that, whatever he was, it wasn't a Brigadier. I don't suppose there was anyone in Whitehall at that moment who did know, though why right-wing Conservatives should worry about Frank Owen becoming a Brigadier and not about Ivor Juhu, I don't know. They needn't have worried. I doubt very much whether Frank Owen would have accepted a paper brigade unless ordered to at the point of a gun. He has made *Seac* a first-class paper, which is dropped in the middle of the jungle every morning, wet or fine, and his column

on the front page, 'Good Morning', is a fearless bit of news and views written by a champion of the soldier, by a man who is on their side. In the same way their Supreme Commander talked to them on many unreported informal occasions from improvised platforms all over the front.

Charles Gardner was well and truly esconced in the saddle when I got back to Delhi, and as far as I could see was running the air side of the Air Marshal's publicity as only a journalist and ex-war correspondent could. My organization with the squadrons was producing the raw material of the stories under Dickie's indefatigable leadership, and Charles was licking them into shape and issuing them to the correspondents. When I returned, the licking into shape was done by the two of us over the most jamless but nonetheless pleasant doughnuts I have ever tasted. It was during one of these sessions that we decided to do a flying trip together round the whole front. The trip came to be known as 'Operation Doughnut'. We had three shots at doing it, but it was not until Doughnut Three that we were able to visit the front together by air.

Other Englishmen in our queer combined team were Charles Eade, editor of the *Sunday Dispatch* and adviser to Joubert, Maurice Thackrah, the chief censor, and Major Ducker, an impressive chap in the Holstein tradition, who moved about behind the scenes to great effect.

The victory over Tanabashi gave Joubert his first chance to put S.E.A.C. on the map and he took it with both hands. As so few correspondents had been on the spot, a mass of material from our R.A.F. P.R.O.s and from army observers was collected and doled out at a big Press conference. The only correspondents who saw much of the fighting were Stanley Wills of the *Daily Herald*—who was inside one of the divisional boxes—Gardner of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and Richard Sharpe of the B.B.C. Sharpe had captured a Jap prisoner who was officially credited to the Corporation in the daily 'ops' conference at Fourteenth Army H.Q. Stanley Wills was later killed in the fatal air crash with Wingate.

There was some grumbling among the correspondents about this way of releasing the story of the battle, but under the circumstances I don't think there was an alternative. The Americans are especially insistent on speed, consistent with security, and their line was that the stories should have been released the moment they came in. Joubert delayed a couple of days in order to plan the release as effectively as possible. This seems to me justifiable provided the delay is small. What else is P.R. to do if not to plan effective publicity?

It was immediately after this conference and Joubert's broadcast to England—his first since taking up the job—that Charles and I set off on Operation Doughnut One. We were not able to go to the front, as there was an urgent job in Bombay. We took a little Fairchild Argus, an American high-wing luxury car of the air, underpowered but comfortable. They were designed for hopping from the country club to the country house, and it was tedious slogging over the Rajputana desert, but we did the sixteen-hundred-mile return journey at a hundred miles an hour in comparative comfort.

Before the winter campaign began, in which Sir Richard Peirse had ordained that the I.A.F. was to try out its new Hurricanes and Vengeances, he called a conference of the Squadron Commanders of the ten squadrons, four of which were ready to go into the front line, the rest of which were converting to their new aircraft. The C.O.s were ordered to fly in their own aircraft from wherever they happened to be and to report to Delhi for the opening of the conference by the Air Commander-in-Chief. They all got the signal in ample time to

act on it, except Meher Singh, commanding 6 Squadron. He was taking his boys into the line at the time and had only received the signal at nine o'clock on the night before he was supposed to report in Delhi. He stuffed pyjamas and a tooth-brush into the back of his Hurricane and took off at 10 p.m. on a moonless night to fly alone and without wireless aids to Delhi. He flew at fourteen thousand feet, landed at Allahabad to refuel and reached Willingdon airport, nine hundred miles from his starting-point, at 4 a.m. He was at the opening session of the conference that morning with all the others, as if nothing had happened. I saw him there and knew nothing about it until afterwards. It was a magnificent flight. Sir Richard described it later, at a convocation of the Muslim University of Aligarh, as a feat of which any air force in the world would be proud.

Meher Singh's squadron had been formed from my old Flight and it had a number of pilots who had been with me at Bombay and Cochin. Not long before, the squadron with its new Hurricanes had been inspected at the airport in Delhi by members of the Legislative Assembly. I can't help telling the story against Pandit Hirdaynath Kunzru, a strong Nationalist politician who for many years had been attacking the Government for not advancing Indianization of the services. Here he was with nine brand-new Hurricane Mark 2 aircraft in a row commanded by an Indian officer and flown by a fine bunch of young Indian pilots. He was poking round one of the aircraft looking rather sour when I saw him, so I asked whether he would like to sit in the cockpit. He said he would. After a struggle he was inserted into the seat and I noticed him looking very worried at the steel longerons along the left-hand side of the cockpit. As he got out he pointed to part of the steel tubing where the new paint had already been worn away by the pilot's feet where he stepped on it every time he got into his aircraft. "Are these aeroplanes for our Indian Air Force worn out and second-hand?" he asked, with that political look which I knew so well.

I did my best to explain that the aircraft were absolutely new and for their work of fighter reconnaissance quite the best we had in this theatre. I went round the cannon and the R/T and the Merlin engine rather like a desperate salesman at Bourne and Hollingsworth's with a tough old lady shopper who has almost decided not to buy. I am sure he was convinced that because the paint of a longeron was chipped, the ill-disposed Government was palming off duds on the Indian Air Force. It is this inability of the Indian politician ever to trust the Government which makes the political problem so difficult of solution. It also is a measure of the intense bitterness which we have aroused in the hearts of these sensitive people.

But I had the last laugh on Pandit Kunzru. I had snapped him with my Rolleiflex camera as he got into the cockpit of the Hurricane, and I gave the picture to Devdas Gandhi, Gandhiji's son and editor of the violently anti-British Congress paper, *The Hindustan Times*. Kunzru was not a Congressman, although very Nationalistic, and Devdas was quite prepared to kill two birds with one stone by putting Kunzru in an embarrassing political position for taking an interest in the Government-sponsored Indian Air Force, with which the purist Nationalist would normally have nothing to do; and at the same time he was ready to give a discreet publicity to what even the most pure of purists could hardly deny was now an all-Indian service—the only one of the three. He printed it on the front page—the only time I got an air force picture into *The Hindustan Times*.

CHAPTER XVII

BROADWAY IN BURMA

AT THE BEGINNING of March the stage was set for the second act of the Burma campaign. Everyone knew that something was about to happen; it only remained to see whether the curtain would rise on the Japanese in the centre of the stage or whether we should find that genuinely mysterious figure, Wingate, slipping into the jungle scenery with cloak and dagger and followed by great numbers of his Chindit conspirators.

In point of fact it was Wingate. The defeat of Tanabashi in Arakan had momentarily put the Japs off their balance. They were scratching their heads as to whether they should continue with their plan for the double invasion of India or whether they should call it off now that the first part of the gigantic pincer-movement had failed. While they were scratching their heads Wingate acted with tremendous speed and with that imaginative genius which made Jap strategy seem clumsy and our own previous methods worse than childish. On 6th March, Operation T was launched. Wingate simply leap-frogged over the three Jap divisions which were massed on the east bank of the Chindwin river and, by the most spectacular methods yet used in this war on any front, with the help of the American Air Task Force and R.A.F. and American transport squadrons, he placed one complete division of twelve thousand men and over a thousand animals nearly two hundred miles behind the Jap line on the Chindwin. It was a magnificently daring operation and it succeeded beyond the wildest hopes.

But we must go back to the previous summer. In London, Wingate had outlined to the Prime Minister his concept of jungle warfare in Burma. It went like this: All the mountain ranges—and there are plenty of them—and the rivers run north and south. It is a hopeless business to fight across them through hostile territory with large numbers of troops, even though it is possible for small numbers of highly-trained men to do it for short periods, as he had proved in the previous spring. But there is nothing to stop very large numbers of men and animals being taken over these mountains and rivers by air and for their continued maintenance over long periods of time, provided you have air superiority, which we had. If he was given the chance Wingate proposed to introduce whole divisions with their transport animals to the middle of northern Burma and there to dominate the vital area between India and China to the exclusion of the Jap army and air force. By this means air, and probably land, traffic between India and China could be re-established on a large scale and with security. Rangoon and the south of Burma could for the moment go hang until the equipment necessary for their conquest could be forthcoming. In the meanwhile the capture of Northern Burma would have important results for the large-scale pincer strategy against Japan itself, as China could be built up much more rapidly and effectively into the supply base and launching platform for the westerly arm of the anti-Japan pincer.

Wingate's ideas were accepted in principle and he went to the conference at Quebec to elaborate them in detail. It was in this elaboration that he must have provided shocks for orthodox minds. Happily there don't seem to have been any. The first and most important point was the provision of the large number of Transport aircraft necessary to make his tactics successful. These

were promised by the Americans, and Dakotas were the aircraft selected. Considerable numbers of American transport squadrons were allocated to this task and sent to India, while fresh R.A.F. transport squadrons were raised and equipped with the same type. The next step was the consideration of the airfield problem.

How were these heavily laden aircraft to land in a jungle which was under enemy control? Wingate had an answer for this, a revolutionary one. During his previous long-range penetration into Burma he had noticed a large number of suitable landing-strips in the paddy fields, many of them admirably concealed both from the air and from the surrounding country—suitable, that is, if only the shallow humps of earth—bunds as they are known and which retain the water in the small rice-fields—could be flattened out. In some places even this flattening out process had not been necessary. Michael Vlasto had landed and taken off, admittedly with little room to spare, but he had done it. It was clear, however, that some lighter form of aircraft would have to land first with engineers and excavating machinery to flatten out strips on which the big troop-carriers could land. It was here that he produced his most fantastic idea.

He suggested the use of gliders, which should carry baby bulldozers, be released over the chosen areas, glide down with their engineers and equipment, land on a small paddy field and disgorge its men to make a big strip. In addition, he wanted many squadrons of light American hedge-hopping aircraft with very small landing space to drop supplies to individual columns in places where the large aircraft couldn't find them; he wanted these little buzz-boxes of the air to carry off his wounded from the woodland glades and roadsides where most of his battles and skirmishes were fought, so that they could be deposited at the main strips and be evacuated by the Dakotas to India within a few hours of being hit—all this in enemy-held land two hundred miles inside their territory. He also wanted rubber boats with engines to help him cross the wide and swift rivers with speed and safety.

He wanted to dispose of an air force of his own, fighters and medium bombers, which could be brought into action in exclusive support of his men at any moment of the day or night.

And such was his brilliance and determination that he got all this and more besides. General Arnold and Lord Louis Mountbatten agreed particularly with the last point about the mobile supporting air force, which it was agreed should be an American force. In deference to his previous work as Chief of Combined Operations, Arnold accepted Mountbatten's suggestion that this small air force should be called the 'Air Commandos' and Colonel Philip Cochrane, a colourful and adventurous young American air-ace, was given command.

All through the autumn and winter American factories went flat out on the high priorities for 'Project 9' as it was known. Gliders and light aircraft and all the elaborate equipment necessary for the mammoth long-range air penetration were built and shipped to the lazy brown waters of the Hooghly, where they were assembled and sent up to the secret bases in Assam from which the expedition was to be launched.

I landed at one of these bases at this time. From the air we could see the curious moth-like forms of the gliders, row on row of them parked along the side of the broad grass strip, motionless like huge butterflies on a board. On the strip there was an atmosphere of excitement and suspense. Everything was new and crazily unconventional. Who ever heard of mules travelling in aircraft? Yet along this strip there were dozens of them being pulled, pushed,

and coaxed up wooden ramps into aircraft which normally carry men and baggage. Along the edges of the strip were thousands of yards of thick, silken, twisted ropes, the tow ropes for the gliders. In another corner of the field were the little single-engined L5s buzzing in and out over the trees. Everywhere there were bearded Chindits with Bush hats and knives and revolvers leading horses and mules, filling aircraft with stores and troops, and wearing that indefinable air of exclusiveness which belongs to all who are united in a common and desperate enterprise, an air of unconscious separateness which is felt particularly keenly by those who are going to stay behind in the safety of the base.

At another field a few miles away were Colonel Philip Cochrane and his boys of the Air Commando Force, one of whom was Jackie Coogan, now very much grown up and with two thousand hours' flying to his credit. He was one of Cochrane's Young Ladies, as his glider-pilots were known. This force consisted of Dakotas which did the towing of the gliders, the gliders themselves and their crews, a force of long-range fighters—Lightnings—and of interceptor fighters—Mustangs—there were also Mitchells in one of which Wingate was to meet his end before he could see the successful conclusion of his campaign. This Air Commando Force, which later in the show was to come under the wider control of Air Marshal Baldwin, and the Third T.A.F., was at this stage quite independent, a confusing state of affairs for the rest of the world and the other air forces in the theatre, but it seemed to work.

And now we come to the general plan. Two areas had been chosen north and south of the great bend in the Irrawaddy, two hundred miles or so east of Imphal, where strips could be made in a short time. The idea was that the gliders should be towed by night by the twin-engined Dakotas over the eight-thousand-feet-high Chin Hills and the Imphal Valley, over the Chindwin into Burma, be released over these two clearings in the jungle and crash land on to the level ground. They would then get out their bulldozers, level the strip, and as soon as possible after that the troop-carriers in their hundreds would come in night after night until they had disgorged a complete division into the area, a division which would hold the airstrips and enable even larger forces to be poured into them as required by the campaign. In very general terms Wingate's strategy was then to send one column north-east in the direction of the Hukong Valley where they should join up with General Stilwell's Chinese and American forces which were forging down from Ledo in the north in the direction of the key-town to North Burma, Myitkyina, and between them crush the Jap 18th Division. Other Chindits would turn west, back in the direction of India, and harass the lines of communication of the three Jap divisions which were lying up on the Chindwin facing India, all ready to attack it, if the high-ups decided on such a suicidal course.

An added difficulty to the many which were presented by this ambitious and unconventional plan was the move of a considerable number of Jap aircraft, especially fighters, up from the Rangoon area to three or four key-airfields in central Burma near Shwebo, where they were clearly waiting for the word go to support their divisions ready for the attack on Imphal. These airfields—Anbauk, Anesekan, and Shwebo—were uncomfortably close to the line which our transports and gliders would have to take night after night under the full Burma moon and without any defences on their aircraft. The situation was full of interest. The stage was set with both sides not knowing what the other was going to do and when, although Wingate was determined that come what may he was going to do it first. On 6th March the principal players in our company were in the wings—Wingate, Air Marshal Baldwin, General Old,

and Cochrane. They were all set to go and the gliders had been almost completely filled up with men, bulldozers, and guns when a P.R.U. pilot landed with photographs he had taken that afternoon of the southerly of the two strips. They were hastily processed and examined. To Wingate's horror they found on the prints that one strip—Piccadilly—had been obstructed with logs. The pilot had no pictures of the other strip and so the decision had to be taken whether to go on with the operation, as it seemed as if the Japs had got wind of it and the second clearing might be obstructed as well.

At a hurried last-minute conference it was decided to go through with the operation and divert all the gliders to the first strip. It was a brave decision and it worked. The Japs, as it turned out, had no idea of the operation and had obstructed the clearing as a routine affair.

The sun went down over the plains of Assam and a full Burma moon rose majestically over the Chin hills. The first Dakota gathered speed in a cloud of dust and hauled its ungainly moths off the ground. More and more followed, circling up into the clear night, slowly, ponderously gaining height over the airfield so that they could slip over the high mountains which could be seen from the airfield a few miles to the east. Operation T was under way. Colonel Jim Bellah and Peter and Jackie Coogan and many another brave and true man were sitting helpless in those aerial cockleshells attached by a thread of silk to a lumbering troop-carrier, with no guns between them and some of the worst country in the world beneath them, and eastwards of them to their target. It was cold-blooded and silent adventure, a wild but determined leap in the dark.

I have heard the story of that weird adventure from several of those who went in to Broadway that night. The plan was for the first gliders to be released directly over the strip, to glide down over the trees and, it was hoped, slide smoothly to rest on the grass. If anything went wrong and it was clearly impossible for the rest of the gliders to get down, one of the first glider-pilots was to fire a red Verrey light. "But that light's in a mighty deep pocket," said Cochrane before they set off.

The first mishaps took place on the base strip where some of the gliders broke loose from their towing aircraft before they had cleared the airfield. After a while General Old and Air Marshal Baldwin decided that two gliders was too much of a strain for one towing Dakota and only one glider went off at a time. This necessarily slowed up the whole operation, but it was much safer and there were no cases of broken tow-ropes when this plan was adopted. Several of the gliders broke away from their tow-ropes over the tremendous Chin Hills and managed by superb piloting to glide down into safety, some of them into the Manipur Valley. Others were not so lucky and the silken strands of their tow-ropes didn't part until they had passed over the Chindwin and were inside Burma. Peter was inside one of these gliders, unbeknown, I think, to his exalted bosses in Delhi. They landed near a Jap H.Q. and hid up until they were able to slip back on foot across the river and into the safety of the Chin Hills. To do this they must have passed very close to the three Jap divisions which were coiling themselves to strike at Imphal. Peter's absence from Delhi was hardly noticeable. One night he was at the Imperial Hotel looking very bored, a few days later he was slipping quietly along the corridors of G.H.Q. as if nothing had happened.

Over Broadway the first gliders were cast off under the full Burma moon. They sailed noiselessly down, swishing slowly through the night air, their crews and passengers as keyed-up as violin strings. They hit the earth gently enough,

but then their troubles began. The surface of the clearing was covered with thick grass. Underneath there were pretty hefty furrows at irregular intervals which had not been visible on the aerial photographs. The gliders went full belt into these furrows. Some of them got away with it, others coming on behind were unable to stop in time before either piling up on to a furrow or on to one of the gliders which had crashed ahead of them. One glider came down between two trees. The wings were caught by the trees and the fuselage was hurled on with increased speed, the baby bulldozer being catapulted over the heads of the two pilots, who were unhurt. But the bulldozer went for a Burton as did every one of the others. It was the devil's luck, for this equipment, specially designed for the job, was the most important factor in the first stage of the operation. One glider carrying Jerry Dunn, the S.E.A.C. army observer, parted from its tug a few miles from the objective and had to force land in the thick jungle. There was nothing left of the frail craft or its brave occupants save pulp and matchwood, when some of the first party got to them after hacking their way through the undergrowth. Jim Bellah, who was with the rescue party, told me how there was nothing they could do but set fire to the remains of the glider and make a funeral pyre for the brave men who had trusted their lives to some twisted strands of silk.

At Broadway there was nothing to be done but get on with the levelling of the strip by hand in the absence of bulldozers. They had at any rate got enough men down to work on the field and enough soldiers deployed in the surrounding woods to hold the place while this crucial part of the job was under way. But the Japs remained in complete ignorance of what had happened in the heart of the country which they were occupying. All night the American engineers and glider-pilots and the British and Indian soldiers worked feverishly to clear away the wrecked gliders and level off the furrows so that the big Dakotas could land there with their streams of men and supplies before twenty-four hours had gone by. They also buried their dead—there were a hundred and twenty-one—the only casualties in the whole operation of landing a division and its transport in this inaccessible and hostile place.

They dug and levelled and dragged the gliders into the undergrowth all that day. Gurkhas sat on the wings of those giant dead moths and hacked them to pieces with their kukhris. It would have been too dangerous to set them on fire in the daytime. As it was everyone was looking anxiously at the skies in case a wandering Jap reconnaissance aircraft should spot them and tumble to the plan before any of the troop-carriers could get there. The consequences of this were too dreadful to contemplate—concentrations of troops from Bhamo not far distant, heavy bombing of the strip, interception of the defenceless Dakotas, the ruination of the whole campaign for the reconquest of North Burma. All these were the short and long-term possibilities which might result from one pair of Japanese eyes happening to glance down from twenty thousand feet and strike this patch of jungle in the sea of the Burma forests, this little island where perhaps his attention wandering over the expanse of valleys and hills in routine patrolling might suddenly focus in a flash of curiosity at the unusual activity of so many human ants in this broad and open space. But no one came.

As darkness drew near, not twelve hours from the time when these determined Americans, Englishmen, and Indians had set to work, a landing-strip twelve hundred yards long had been levelled sufficiently for heavy aircraft to land and take off at night—that night.

The news was flashed back to base and before midnight the first Dakota

of Troop-Carrier Command, piloted by General Old himself, circled round the wide low valley and was signalled in by the control officer. It was followed in by the squadron-commanders, both British and American, of that magnificent force. Fielden and Fatty Pearson, and Coles and Bill Burberry, the four Wing-Commanders of our leading troop-carrier squadrons, landed in quick succession, their wing landing-lights scarcely necessary under the full orange moon—a Burma moon. They landed without incident, were signalled to their parking bays, at the down-wind end of the strip. Inside three minutes their troops were out of the aircraft, they had turned round and taken off in the opposite direction to that in which they had landed and along the side of the strip. There was no wind, and in this way the delay and dust of taxi-ing was cut out. So efficient was the control on the ground that only two aircraft out of the many hundreds of landings that were made ran into one another. Over eighty aircraft were cleared from Broadway that first momentous night and almost enough troops were landed to ensure at least the holding of the strip by force should that be necessary. Brigadier Mike Calvert, who won the D.S.O. in the previous expedition for leading one of the columns and blowing up the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway in a manner worthy of Lawrence at his best, was one of the first to land.

Alex Pearson, 'Fatty' as he is better known in the service, told me afterwards what that landing was like. The flight over Burma, under a full moon, not knowing what sort of a landing-ground was offering at the other end, was pretty unpleasant. From a flying point of view the moon was grand and it helped in the landing, but it would have been a piece of cake for the Japs to have intercepted them at night had they discovered what was on foot. Once they had landed the first time and seen the magnificent ground control, which kept them in the air for less time than it takes to do a circuit, and clear them off again inside five minutes, they had complete confidence and it became a routine shuttle-service, 'like No. 11 bus', as one of them put it.

For six nights this shuttle-service went on at an average of a hundred landings a night. Sir John Baldwin went in on the second night. He said: "Nobody can understand what an airborne operation is really like who has not stood at Broadway under a Burma moon and watched the troop-carriers come in at the rate of one every three minutes." It must have been one of the most impressive sights of the war, made all the more breath-taking when it is remembered that we had established an airport busier than Tempelhof or Laguardia Field two hundred miles behind the Jap lines and from which we only operated in darkness.

There were many incidents during the early stages of the operation. In one of the Dakotas a mule broke loose from the long bamboo pole inside the fuselage to which it was tied. It seemed to want to help the pilot and put its head into the cockpit over the pilot's shoulder. There was a struggle to get him back and eventually he had to be shot in the air. The Dakotas rapidly began to look and smell like stables. Many were the tasks of the air crew which they might well have learnt from the Women's Land Army and which no F.T.S. had ever taught them.

All the crews were flying two sorties in a night involving anything up to eight hours' night flying. At the end of a week Wingate was able to say that the air forces, British and American, had done their work and that the first task of landing a division with its transport and weapons had been accomplished without loss other than those incurred on the first night. Moreover, the Japs had not an inkling as to what was going on.

Then the inevitable happened. One afternoon high in the sky there was an aircraft, a twin-engine Army 100 recce—it was unmistakable. The secret was out. The Japs had found us and the air attack was merely a matter of time. But we didn't mind so much now that the main task was over, although of course it was still essential to keep the strip and maintain it as a fortress through which we could pass as many men as were required by the developing operations of the Chundits and for the supplying of the division already dropped.

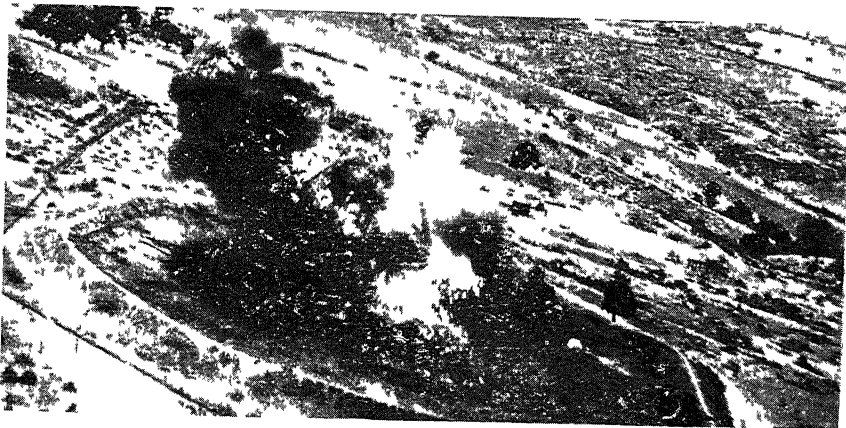
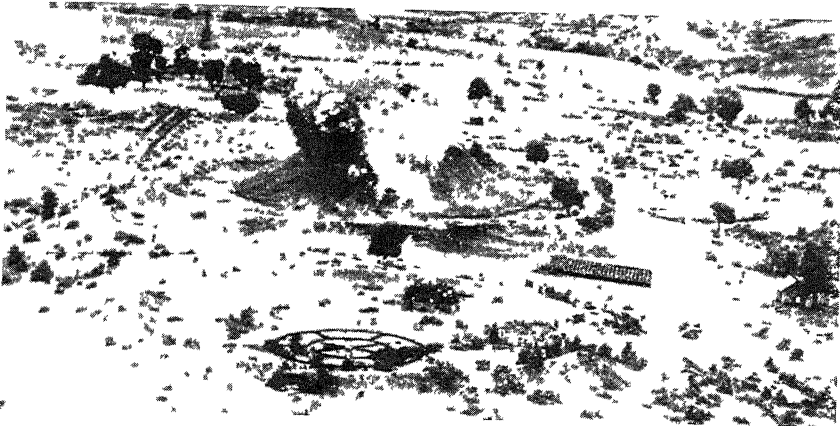
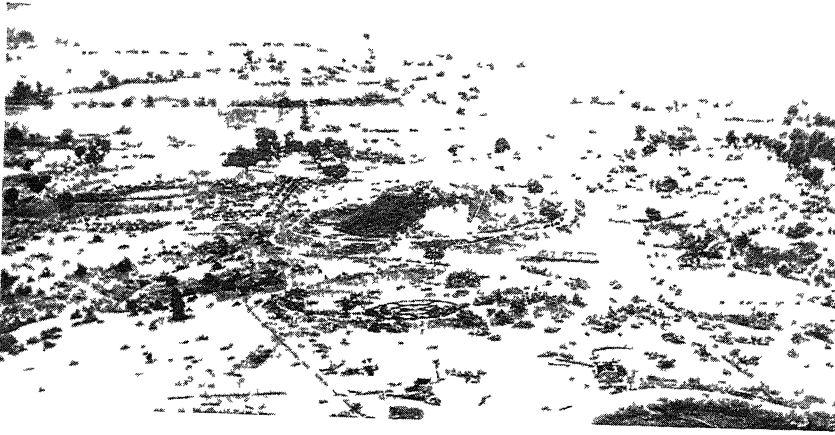
A message was flashed back to the Third T.A.F. and to Cochrane. The first arrivals the next morning were six Spitfires of 81 Squadron newly arrived on the Assam-Burma front from Italy. This squadron—its emblem was the Ace of Spades—had piled up ninety-nine enemy victims by the time this flight landed at Broadway, most of them Germans. The C.O. was only twenty-one and had eleven victims at this time. Their arrival on the strip was timely but inauspicious. The first aircraft to land on the rough paddy surface bounced and tipped up on its nose, breaking the air-screw. It seemed to be an unhappy event at the time, but in point of fact, shortly afterwards, this prang was to have the most far-reaching and beneficial results. The rest of them landed safely, a feat for such light and tender aircraft, and were quickly parked out of sight under the trees. They didn't have long to wait.

Luckily the five Spits had just enough warning to get off the ground safely and clear the trees, but it was touch and go. In a flash twenty of those wicked-looking army O1 fighters, the military version of the famous navy Zero, called Oscar for short, came whipping over the trees and tried to beat hell out of the strip and its defenders. Some of them dropped small anti-personnel bombs. One of them fell twenty yards from a slit trench where a photographer, Corporal Dowd, was taking refuge. He told me the story of this particular fight and it must have been a thriller to watch.

The Japs had found the strip—after nearly eight days—and one can only imagine that they expected to wipe it out completely after a few concentrated air attacks. You can imagine what we should have thought if the Japs had built a twelve-hundred-yard landing-strip in the Ganges delta within fifty miles of some of our best fighter stations. It is interesting to speculate on the feelings of those Japanese fighter-pilots when they suddenly found tracer from Spitfires, of all things, flashing past their windscreens at this place a hundred and fifty miles beyond the range of the nearest hostile fighters—as they thought.

It was a wonderful battle, rather similar to a carrier affair, for Broadway was to all intents and purposes an aircraft-carrier in a hostile sea. In a short while the Spits would have to land and refuel. They could not fly away to friendly airfields for this purpose, and if they had not put the enemy to flight before their tanks ran out they would be sitting shots on the ground for the enemy fighters. Moreover, there were only five of them against twenty of the enemy. But here again, as so often on the many battle-fronts of the war, that extraordinary talent for brilliant improvisation which seems to be the peculiar virtue of the Anglo-Saxon, and which sadly has so often to come to his rescue in tight corners of his own peace-time making, was stupendously apparent on this paddy field in Burma. Flight-Sergeant Grey, the pilot of the crashed Spitfire, sat in his cockpit by the side of the runway and controlled the battle, for it was no stratospheric affair, but a tree-top *mêlée* in which the Spits had only just got away from the ground before the unsuspecting attackers had themselves come in at a low level to beat up the strip.

The Allied fighter-pilots on this front have more respect for the Jap pilots



THESE THREE PHOTOGRAPHS WERE TAKEN FROM THE NOSE OF A BEAUFIGHTER as it was attacking a petrol storage tank at the Ladaing Tank Farm, the famous oil refinery in Central Burma.



BEAUFIGHTERS PLAYED AN OUTSTANDING PART IN HARASSING JAP COMMUNICATIONS UNTIL THE ENEMY WAS FORCED TO MOVE ONLY AT NIGHT

A Beaufighter attacks the engine of a goods train. A glance at the trees shows how low the attacks were pressed home.

and for the Oscar fighter than newspaper readers would imagine. There is no doubt that the Jap fighter is still the most manoeuvrable aircraft of its kind in the world. It can sit up and beg—it can cock snooks at our more heavily-armed, gunned, and engined machines. But if it is caught out of position by any American or British pilot its days are numbered. On this occasion the odds were on the Japs, who were much more manoeuvrable at low level than the Spitfires. To even this out we had them momentarily surprised. In addition, the badly outnumbered squadron had only one run to make for its century. Appropriately it was the young C.O. who shot down the hundredth aircraft. Each of the other four pilots saw it go down.

Then Flight-Sergeant Grey came into the picture. He controlled the actions of his comrades from the cockpit of his grounded fighter on the edge of the strip. He sat with his P/T mask in his hand and watched the fight like a radio commentator at a football match. His intervention and guidance in this low-level scrimmage may well have been decisive. Of the twenty Japs three were destroyed for certain and several more were probably destroyed and damaged. They made off before the Spits had run out of petrol and without having done any damage to the vital strip which could not be repaired with a shovel in ten minutes. The first round had been won, but from now on it would be no picnic. Air and land forces would undoubtedly concentrate with overwhelming weight on this tiny reef in the enemy sea from now onwards. But again they didn't.

One of the most highly developed features of our land and air warfare on all fronts since the very beginning has been our photographic reconnaissance. The Americans have followed in our footsteps. Amazingly enough, neither the Germans nor the Japanese have ever taken the trouble to systematize this vital aspect of intelligence work, which is surprising in two nations one of whose few points in common seems to be an infinite capacity for taking pains. Our photographic reconnaissance of the enemy airfields in his back areas of Rangoon and even of Bangkok in far-off Thailand was thorough and regular.

On 8th March some remarkably interesting pictures of the big airfield at Mingaladon, near Rangoon, were processed at Comilla. They showed a reduction of nearly fifty Jap aircraft from the previous day, mostly fighters. Where had they gone? At this time we were pretty certain he had not discovered Broadway. It seemed a logical deduction that he had sent these fighters forward to some airfields nearer the front, probably in support of the big thrust into India which we knew he was planning near Imphal. There was only one group of fields to which we felt he would dare commit his precious and dwindling supply of aircraft in this theatre, that is a group which was near enough for his army support purposes and not near enough in his own estimation for our fighters to attack easily.

Cochrane decided to have a crack at this group of airfields with the long-range fighters and medium bombers of his small but powerful air force. The three fields concerned were Onbauk, Anisekan, and Shwebo, all within a few miles of each other about half-way up Burma near the banks of the Irrawaddy. It was a brilliant success—one of the neatest and most thorough air victories of this war.

The air commandos went in for the first attack at dawn with Lightnings and Mitchells. They achieved complete surprise. The Jap aircraft were more or less evenly divided between the three strips. Some were refuelling, some were being serviced on the tarmac, others were parked in blast-proof pens. Not one of them could get off the ground. One American said: "We caught them with their kimonos down." And that was about the size of it. The

Americans with their cannon, the Mitchells using their heavy 75 mm. guns, simply made minced meat of the Jap aircraft, and when R.A.F. Hurricanes of the Third T.A.F. came later in the day to finish them off there was little they could do, although they did add their bit to the toll of destruction, chiefly by setting fuel dumps and buildings on fire. In the evening a further unit of the air commandos had another piece of luck by catching a squadron of Japs just as they were coming in to land at one of these fields. Fifteen of them were shot down in the air, such was the overwhelming surprise achieved by the Americans. On that day and the next forty-six Jap aircraft were destroyed on the ground and in the air at these three fields. By Burma standards, where the Jap air force is seldom more than two hundred front-line aircraft strong, this was a quite exceptional figure, and the victory played a big part in the success of the airborne operation which was proceeding unimpeded less than a hundred miles to the north.

Despite the caning which the Americans had given to the Jap air force in these unique operations, they made determined efforts as the days went by to catch our Spits on the ground at Broadway as a preliminary to unobstructed bombardment of the strip and its elimination as an airport for reinforcing the Chindits. Our warning system was naturally hampered by these conditions, and a few days after the main operation had been completed a force of nearly thirty Oscars made a fresh tree-level attack on Broadway. The warning was not more than a few minutes. The C.O. just managed to get off the ground as the armada of enemy fighters swept at them up the clearing. He had barely got his under-carriage up when he took a long shot into the middle of them and brought down one Jap. But the odds were too much and within a few seconds his Spitfire had crashed on to the end of the runway, where it crumpled up and burnt out. This, I think, must be one of the most gallant deaths of the war. Taken at the greatest disadvantage possible for a fighter-pilot, he had flown into the middle of a very formidable formation, outnumbered thirty to one, brought down one enemy aircraft and then paid the inevitable price. One Australian pilot, who managed to follow his C.O. off the ground, did a climbing roll through the oncoming Japs at ground level and was able to get through them unscathed. He climbed up and won some height from which he was able to shoot down one and damage others. But the rest of the flight were caught on the ground and their beautiful aircraft were smashed up. Soon afterwards larger numbers of Cochrane's Mustangs turned up and from then on, with an improved warning system, despite repeated Jap attacks, the strip was scarcely interfered with seriously from the air.

Soon news trickled in from the columns of Chindits that a Jap force several hundred strong was on the way to the famous clearing, obviously with the intention of seizing it. By this time we were pretty confident that we could hold it from the ground as well as the air. But it was a struggle, and this force of Japs did at one time succeed in establishing itself at the northern end of the strip, preventing us from landing troop-carriers for several days. One Dakota, which turned up over Broadway soon after the Jap column had fought its way to the north end of the runway, landed in ignorance of what had happened. The pilot rolled unsuspectingly up to the end before taxi-ing to his bay as usual, and was astonished when tracer began to streak past his windows from the undergrowth. He turned round and took off quickly in the other direction. The impetuosity and arrogance of the Japs had again let them down. If they had held their fire until he had switched off his engines they could probably have taken him prisoner and destroyed his aircraft with ease.

The ousting of this force of Japs from its embarrassing hold on the runway was again a masterpiece of Wingate technique. An R.A.F. officer went forward with a patrol to investigate the Jap positions. They got very close and the R.A.F. visitor was able to memorize their positions in the undergrowth. Then he flew out to India in a light aircraft and a concerted land-air attack was planned. After mortaring and firing on the Japs from the Chindits a few hundred yards away a wave of medium bombers came over with the R.A.F. officer in the leading bomber. He pin-pointed the Jap positions, which otherwise would have been hidden from the pilots, and accurate bombing was achieved. Shortly after this a squadron of American P40's, carrying bombs, made dive attacks on the positions with devastating accuracy. As soon as they had pulled away, the Chindits rushed forward at top speed and killed off the dazed Japanese who had survived the air attacks. It was a neat and well co-ordinated piece of work. Until we voluntarily put up the shutters at Broadway, more than a month later, there was no more serious trouble from the Japs.

An interesting discovery at the conclusion of this little operation was that a number of the light American Austers and L5's which had perforce been abandoned at the north end of the runway, when the Japs put in their attack, had not been put out of action but had been slashed and cut about by the Jap soldiers in a frenzy of ineffective anger. They had prodded the tender canvas and ply fuselage with their bayonets; they had cut the wings and jabbed the tail-planes; in some cases they had cut out the star of Uncle Sam and pasted in the rising sun; in no case had they destroyed the engine or broken up the control surfaces. This extraordinary childishness, combined with their incomprehensible cruelty and lack of imagination, suggests they are even more primitive and near to savages than we imagine. It also supports strongly Wingate's view that the man of independent thought brought up in the west is infinitely superior to the Jap in fighting technique. He has simply to abandon for the time being his dependence on a machine-made civilization so far as his own subsistence in the jungle goes, and make use of that machinery in conjunction with his powers of initiative and imagination to bring an overwhelmingly powerful force to bear on the Jap. This is happening in the sea and air war of the S.W. Pacific where the Japs have not been able to hold their gains against the Allies, still committed as are the latter to the war in Europe. What can be their fate when the navies and air forces of the west are added to those of General MacArthur and Lord Mountbatten?

Very few of the correspondents went into Broadway, but quite a number of them attached themselves to Wingate himself on the occasion of the crossing of the Chindwin by Brigadier Bernard Fergusson and his brigade, which went on foot to march across northern Burma in the direction of Indaw. The crossing of the Chindwin this year was a very different affair to that of last year when the whole Phantom Army crossed by wading and swimming and in the few boats which they could collect. This time they went across with the new equipment at twice the speed and with twice the loads. Wingate himself and Graham Stanford of the *Daily Mail* landed on a small sandbank in the middle of the river in one of the Austers which were now flying over these mountains and jungles in swarms. Everywhere there was movement and expedition, but the Japs again had no inkling what was afoot. John Nixon of the B.B.C. and Stewart Emeny of the *News Chronicle*, Stanley Wills of the *Herald* and, I think, Gardner, the Australian, were all buzzing around with Wingate in and out of this crossing, which took place a little before the main air landing at Broadway.

Back in Delhi as soon as the first big Press conference covering the landing operation had been held and the many stories arising out of it had been sent off to London, Charles Gardner and I did our best to initiate our long-deferred Operation Doughnut, which we hoped would take us to the front and into Burma to see for ourselves. It was galling having to stay in Delhi when so much was happening. But Fate was still against us and Charles couldn't get away. So I took another Fairchild Argus and flew to the front, stopping for a night in Calcutta with Ian Stephens, editor of *The Statesman*.

At Comilla I heard the news of the Jap attack against our Imphal front. It had come at last. The Japs had cast discretion to the winds, as was their invariable custom. Despite the utter failure of their first offensive in the south in early February and the brilliant leap-frog of the Chindits over their back in the central sector, where we landed plum astride the Jap lines of communication, they suddenly crossed the Chindwin with three divisions and filtered determinedly through the almost impenetrable Soma hill-tracts and Chin Hills like death-watch beetles working away at a thick beam.

These hill-tracts are inhabited by sparse populations of hill-men, Chins, Kachins, and Nagas. These people live a precarious existence. They like to be left in peace, which the Japs do not seem capable of understanding, but which is well appreciated by the experienced English commissioner who has looked after their destinies paternally for many years. They dislike the Japs intensely.

The Japs were in considerable strength and they were able to capture our forward outpost at Tamu just on the Indian side of the Chindwin without difficulty. The fighter strip, which we had to give up to them, was never used by the Japs during the entire campaign. An obvious disadvantage, however, was the possession of the road of which Tamu was the terminus and which led, after about a hundred and twenty miles of turns and twists, into Imphal. Farther south the left wing of the Japanese army was able to threaten our 17th Division which was holding the southerly outpost of Tiddim, also at the end of the only other respectable road in that part which led more or less due north into the southern end of the Imphal Valley. In the north the right wing of the Japs penetrated along village tracks and woodslides, over the steepest hills and through the thickest jungle to the vital village of Ukhrul, which was an important outpost of ours protecting Kohima on the main road from Imphal to Dimapur in Assam. After a remarkably short time the Jap threefold thrust had gained the inevitable tactical advantages which will always accrue to attacker in these inaccessible places and which led to gloomy forebodings in India. This is roughly what happened in the first few days.

In the south the Japs cut off the 17th Division by blocking the Tiddim-Imphal road above them to the north while attacking them at the south. It was now that General Scoones, commanding the Fourth Corps, settled on the main principles of his campaign. He decided to withdraw as much as possible into his large natural fortress of the Imphal Valley, where he had ample food, ample airfields, and, most important of all, ample room to manoeuvre his tanks and superior forces. He would, if possible, lure the Japs on into this fort and either annihilate them on ground of his own choosing, or let them languish round the walls of his fastness in the inhospitable jungle waiting for the onset of the drenching monsoon. He knew that there would never be any possibility of his fortress being starved out by the Japs, for we had air power and the ubiquitous troop-carrier command.

So he ordered the 17th Division to fight its way back into the Imphal Valley over the hundred miles of winding road from Tiddim. This they did very

successfully, saving most of their motor transport. They fought their way through the road blocks, and although they had to leave the Jap southern division in possession of the road they were able to withdraw to Pael inside the valley and draw the portcullis up behind them.

In the centre the Japs streamed up the Tamu road with light tanks and with their artillery. But they stopped before they reached the valley.

It was soon evident that the Japs were making their most determined effort in the north; and it was quickly obvious why. They hoped to do either, or both, of the following things: They would either capture Ukhrul, only some thirty miles from Imphal itself, and then come pouring down the Ukhrul road into Imphal; or, having captured Ukhrul, they would swing slightly north and attack the vital road which connects Imphal with Dimapur a hundred and twenty miles to the north and down in the Assam plain. If they could capture Kohima and block off Imphal they hoped perhaps that they would be able to starve out the garrison. More than that, they would be able to move north down the road into Assam, capture the railway town of Dimapur and cut off General Stilwell in the far distant Hukawng Valley, who depended for his stores and supplies on the Assam railway which linked Calcutta with the far north-eastern corner of India and which passed through Dimapur right underneath the hills which the Japs hoped to dominate. In this northern sector they soon reached points threatening the key outpost of Ukhrul. Astonishingly soon. They were wriggling through the thick Soma hill-tracts over which our stately Dakotas were processing nightly with their cargoes of men for Broadway. They were tyrannizing the villagers, forcing them to carry their ammunition and rations, stealing their rice and burning their villages if they showed any resistance to these typical methods. But as a short-term policy it worked. Within a fortnight they had reached Ukhrul and cut up our Ghurka advance guards.

This was the situation when I arrived in my little Fairchild Argus at Comilla. Dickie was as full of energy and enthusiasm as ever. He introduced me to Group-Captain Donaldson, who was in command of the R.A.F. wing of the Troop-Carrier Command and who had personally flown nearly a hundred operational hours in Dakotas that month. He very kindly consented to send both Steve and myself into Burma with the troop-carriers so that we could see for ourselves what was going on.

Steve* was one of the most remarkable characters in the country. A man of over fifty, though he would deny it, he seemed to have done nearly everything and been nearly everywhere in a life of travel and adventure. At the moment he was a P.R. Colonel on Ivor's staff who had been in charge of the 4th Indian Division publicity in the Western Desert after Desmond Young had been taken prisoner by the Italians. Having carried on this work for a year—during which time he could never be reached by anyone in India because he was always somewhere between our advanced outposts and the enemy, or half-way between Algiers and Basra—Ivor decided to bring him back to India, where he could be under his eye. Now Ivor was in England and Steve was at the front with no intention of going back to Delhi. He had a large swelling on his right foot which was encased in a carpet slipper. Nothing would have kept him out of Burma, and although his foot filled me with misgiving it would have been impossible to have found a more amusing or more spirited companion.

The Group-Captain flew us into the Assam base, from which more men and supplies were constantly being flown into Burma. We just got down on the

* See Note 12.

broad grass strip before one of those fearful thunder-and-wind storms blew up which obliterated the field from the air and brought all work to a standstill. Both Steve and I were soon to experience one of these vile storms from a more uncomfortable place than the edge of that strip. Just then it seemed the most uncomfortable place in the world as we struggled to the shelter of the basha huts a mile away. Later, we would have given the rest of our war-time pay to be in that very spot with firm ground beneath our feet.

Out of the storm in the cheerful hubbub of the basha hut the first person I stumbled against was John Jefferies, the commando, now a full Colonel. Last year, as a Major, he had led one of Wingate's columns and afterwards had lectured on the expedition in America with Bobby Thompson. It was great fun seeing him again and most useful at this juncture.

"Colonel Stevens and I are very anxious to go inside as soon as possible," I said to John, and then he told us that, although naturally only a very few people knew about it, we had in the previous few days opened up another strip inside Burma called Aberdeen, and would we like to go there as Broadway was getting a bit *vieux jeu* these days. Besides, the Japs knew all about Broadway and were paying it regular visits, whereas, with their odd obtuseness in matters of this kind, they had not yet tumbled to Aberdeen, and it might be quieter as well as more interesting. This was a great stroke of luck for Steve and me, so it was agreed that we should leave at four the next morning with an American crew for Aberdeen, spend the day there, or longer if we wished, and come back with the R.A.F. at dusk after twelve hours on the strip.

We spent an uncomfortable night on the floor of a basha hut. At 3.30 we were on the strip in the quiet confusion of this ghostly take-off, among the mules and Ghurkas and West Africans and the gum-chewing, calm, American crews. I was assigned to a Dakota and spoke to the radio operator who was sitting on some boxes in the back. It was the ration aircraft.

"Be careful where you're sitting, buddy," he said, acidly, as he closed the double doors. "Them's mortar bombs youse sittin' on."

Then he went forward and left me in the dark cavern of the curtained aircraft, lying uncomfortably on top of boxes of K rations and mortar bombs.

As we flew through the darkness it was salutary to contemplate the great difference between reading and writing of these flights and the experience of being on them. The drone of the engines, the cold and the blackness inside and out, the unknown—which you can't even see—which lies beneath you, mountains and rivers and a hostile country occupied by thousands of the most cruel and barbaric soldiers in the world. Then, after an hour and a half's flying, I began to feel the increased pressure on my ears and to see a slit of light through the edge of my curtained window. I peered out and saw where we were.

The Dakota was circling round a sly, small valley tucked between two rows of hills. It was just light enough to see the ground. Inside the valley was a level strip picked out on each side by the pale electric bulbs of the flare-path. A bright green Aldis flashed up from the near end of the strip and was reflected in emerald showers on the talc of the window. After we had landed and a group of Chindits were unloading the ammunition and stores from our Dakota I talked to the American crew. They came from all parts of the States—New Jersey, California, and the south. They had been coming in to this new strip for the last few days and knew the way by heart.

"We always drop mortar bombs on the way back if we see anything that looks like a Jap," said the captain.

This practice had been developed by their squadron, and while it was

inaccurate—and not, strictly speaking, their job—they had some fun and I suppose did some damage every now and again.

In a few minutes we had to stop gossiping. The Dakotas were empty and they had to start out on the hazardous journey back into India in broad daylight. This was the most dangerous part of the flight. In five minutes the group of troop-carriers had flown behind the big hill which guarded the western entrance to the valley. We were quite alone. Our line of retreat had been withdrawn and there were two hundred miles of hostile jungle country between us and the friendly territory of India.

I looked round among the seasoned faces of the Chindits. Most of them had beards and were toughened by many days of fighting and trekking in this strange and beautiful country which they had made their own.

I went over to a Major who seemed to be in charge. He had a curly beard, like the disciples in the New Testament. His long staff added to the illusion. His opening oath as quickly dissipated it.

"Christ, why the Hell doesn't Base send us some more men?" he barked at me. "Only five aircraft this morning and they were all filled with food. What the Hell's the use of food if you haven't the men to eat it, and any minute this ruddy strip may be taken over by the Japs?"

I raised an eyebrow and he went on:

"There are five hundred Japs only twenty-four hours' march from here and I haven't got the men to hold the place. Base keep on sending men through—they land here and then go on to join the columns, but they must, for God's sake, keep a few here or they won't be able to hold the strip, and then they won't be able to send any more men through to the columns, will they? Seems silly, doesn't it?"

It did, and it was to seem even sillier later on in that interminable day. This sunburned Major—whose name I never got—had walked for more than three hundred miles to this quiet spot in the middle of Burma—he had walked all the way from Ledo in the far north with a column of these magnificent jungle fighters. Now the rest had gone and he had been told to organize the defence of this strip which had only just been opened. As so often in war, it had been easier to give the order than provide means with which to carry it out. The Major swept his staff over the low line of hills to the west—the direction of Indaw, a big Jap H.Q.

"I've got two platoons of wild Scotsmen in those hills patrolling, but they're not half enough. Those little bastards might be here any moment now, and how the Hell am I going to stop them? Do you know?"

I felt miserably inadequate and intrusive and could only look sympathetic. Then he smiled and said:

"Thank God we've got masses of light and medium flak. There won't be trouble from the air." And then: "Anyway, they are stupid little bastards."

With this he turned away and started lighting his pipe out of the wind.

"If you want some breakfast, go over to the flying-control officer. He's an American and a hospitable type. See you later."

Before moving from the wide turning-circle at the end of the strip I looked up and down that little valley to get my bearings. It was quite a broad valley, flanked by hills covered with tall trees like gums, rising to a thousand feet on each side. To the south-west, at the entrance to this hidden retreat, was a tall massif about three thousand five hundred feet high, a magnificent landmark for the incoming pilots. Through the middle of the valley wound a cosy stream, clear and shallow with sandy banks and a pebble bed and very green patches

of tobacco and paddy by its edge. There were two villages, one at each end of that valley, where life seemed to be proceeding peacefully. There was a regular and repeated noise coming from them both—the pounding of the rice by the womenfolk. There was something sinister, I thought, in this noise. The valley was unnervingly quiet and there was this noise, peaceful, but sinister just the same. Through the valley every now and then columns of men with mules wound slowly across the strip and disappeared into the jungle. All round the strip there were gun emplacements, Bofors, and light machine-guns. The men were sitting out on the parapets scanning the skies.

Steve and I slowly walked down the strip. Half-way down it we saw a light American aircraft by the edge of one of the villages under some trees, and a group of American officers. There was a camp fire.

We went over and introduced ourselves to a lean, American air force officer, Colonel Gaty from La Jolla, California. Colonel Gaty had us to breakfast with him and we heard the story of Aberdeen. It was very much his affair.

Wingate was anxious to develop other strips besides Broadway, and Gaty was one of his instruments for doing this difficult job. A fortnight earlier this valley had been criss-crossed by a pattern of tiny banded paddy fields, but it was well hidden from the air and looked like an ideal spot for a strip. So Gaty had landed in the largest of these fields, three hundred yards long, and prospected it. Soon after, some of the gliders, which I could now see hidden under the trees and bushes near our bivouac, had been dropped over the paddy field with baby bulldozers and engineers. This time there had been no casualties and within a week they had ready a fine Dakota strip. For the last few days they had been using it at dawn and dusk, a much more daring operation than the previous one at Broadway, as the crews had to do one journey in broad daylight. All being well R.A.F. Dakotas should be coming in about six in the evening with more troops and we could go out with them.

Gaty was absorbing in his description of the development of these airfields in enemy territory. He pointed to holes in his aircraft made by Jap small-arms fire and he told of his many journeys over the trees and hills of hostile Burma with Wingate, who was unpredictable in his movements and who always insisted on being flown at once to his destination in whatever aircraft happened to be available. They had landed on roads, by railway lines, near Jap outposts, and on inaccessible paddy fields. Wingate was everywhere and nowhere; for the Japs he was a phantom.

And now Gaty was doing control at this busy little airport of his behind the enemy line. "Any minute now they may find us, but I don't think they know exactly where it is, unless an agent from one of the villages has given us away."

Every now and then we craned our heads into the air as a squadron of high-flying aircraft droned through the blue at twenty thousand feet. Always Gaty's expert and laconic voice drawled out: "A bunch of P40's on their way to Shwebo"—"Some of your Hurricane boys headin' south", or: "Those dive-bombers of yours sure shake them up"; always he knew what they were in a second, before we could even focus them in the sky.

All the time our ears were attuning themselves to the loud, fussy noise of the squadron of light American aircraft which were buzzing in and out of the small neighbouring valley underneath the big mountain. Often they would hop over the intervening hill and land on our big strip bringing wounded Chindits from the columns. These men were laid gently under the wings of a wrecked glider by the side of the strip, where they waited for the evening troop-carrier. The Dakotas would take them to India.

These light aircraft were totally unarmed. They had all flown into Burma at the beginning of the operation, into skies which were the home of the most famous fighter of the eastern war. Once in Burma they did not return to Indian bases when their job was done, but made the hostile land their base. They were flitting over the tree-tops all the day from one of our strips to another—there were dozens of the light-plane strips in this part, in fields, by roads and railways, and in the most impudent and unexpected places. In this valley they were continually breaking the stillness by their noise; it was accentuated by the closeness of the protecting hills. Every time one of them fussed in and out of our valley my heart was in my mouth until I had recognized it.

After breakfast Colonel Gaty read out a sentence from his ten-day-old copy of *Time*. It appeared the Senate of Washington was dissatisfied with the lack of activity on the Burma front and had said so very loud. Gaty's comment was sour and pointed.

"I wish some of those wise guys could be on this strip right now."

As it happened just then there was little doing. The stream flowed calmly, and the villagers looked on curiously at the baby bulldozer which was angrily tearing up a bund and levelling part of the runway. Some of the orange-robed Buddhist priests, shaven and with ugly-looking swords, were walking leisurely through the strip. They had probably seen Jap airfields the day before. They are great walkers. It was all sunny and peaceful but the air was charged with suspense.

I got up and walked off to the stream where I had a date with an English gunner corporal, an excellent man who was in charge of the Bofors guns and was siteing some new posts in anticipation of his officer's arrival. He took a patrol of five men with him and we did a tour of the defences. In one village the corporal showed me a deep, well-built air-raid shelter which the villagers had put up since we had arrived. It was a fine-looking place. At the far end of the village he found an old woman with whom he was friendly. He talked to her in Cockney and the old Burmese crone produced a hatful of eggs. In payment he gave her a handkerchief.

"The General is very keen on starting up sort of markets in these villages, sir," he said to me. "You see, the Japs have taken most of their cloth and food and the things they like and have given them worthless paper money. The General thinks we shall get them to help us if we trade useful things like they don't have just now for eggs and such." So are the brilliant ideas of brilliant men put into effect in these far-off places by the ordinary Englishman.

The corporal sited his guns and we filed back through a few miles of wood and undergrowth to the stream and the defended area around the landing strip. The corporal covered up our tracks behind us.

The day wore on slowly for all of us. Colonel Gaty started up a luxurious stew into which we poured all manner of the fifty-seven varieties. Steve hobbled over to the far side of the strip in his carpet slipper. I went in search of more people with whom to talk and found plenty of excitement.

All day I had felt the excitement in the air. It was not my own reaction to these novel surroundings. It was something shared by all these men on the strip in varying degree. It was the conviction that a fairly substantial force of Japanese infantry was marching in our direction and were not very far away. It was the knowledge that at the moment there were scarcely enough men in the valley to hold it against the Japs, should they arrive to-day.

I soon found a friend. It was a tall young Englishman called Birkett, whose uncle at one time had been senior partner of my firm in Bombay. He was

at the moment army liaison officer with the American Major commanding the squadron of light aircraft operating from over the hill.

"I'm supposed to know what they are doing all the time, but as they are over this blasted hill I don't get much information!" he laughed.

I asked him about the Japs and he said:

"Well, we know there are a bunch of them about, but John Fraser* has his finger pretty well on them," and he pointed to a figure in khaki shorts stretched out on a low underslung charpoy beneath a thatched sun canopy a few yards away. "He's terrific on this part and has villagers coming in every minute telling him where the Japs are. He was here before."

Just as we were talking there was a sudden intensification of light-plane activity. They were all taking off one after another and rising into view from behind the hill. Then they flew off to the north. There was a column of black smoke rising over the crest of the hill.

"Do you know what they are up to now?" I asked. "Haven't an idea," he said; but I thought he looked a bit anxious.

Then one of the light planes landed on our strip; two burly young Americans came over to Colonel Gaty and in excited voices told him a story which made us all sit up. It made my heart take a wild leap.

The American Major on the other side of the hill had received information from a villager that the Jap column was only three miles away and would be at their light-plane strip in a few hours. They had burnt their equipment and were all flying away to Broadway in the north. These two were out of petrol and had landed to pick some up and follow the rest.

Gaty came over to consult Birkett and John Fraser who, with magnificent sang-froid, called for a cup of tea and stayed flat-out on his bed. At this moment a neatly-dressed Burman was brought in whom, it was thought, had informed the American light-plane squadron of the impending Jap arrival. Fraser cross-questioned him in Burmese and was satisfied that he was all right and that although the Japs were near—he had always known that—they were not as near as had been supposed. He offered the Burman some tea, and Birkett and I moved off to enjoy a cup and talk of our mutual friends. It had been a good scene and the tension had been great. It was now relaxed—a bit. At tea, over the open fire, looking anxiously every now and again at the sky and at the hill behind us, I found another friend, just as if we had been at a tea-party in Kensington. He had a black beard and had also walked three hundred miles in the last three weeks. He was an R.A.F. officer, a Canadian wireless operator from Charles Gardner's famous Catalina L for Leather which had shadowed the Jap fleet on Easter Day, 1942. I had flown with him once in Ceylon.

"I know it sounds mad to volunteer for this sort of thing as an operational rest, but I think I am mad."

Time was passing more quickly now. Soon, if all had gone well, we should be hearing the engines of the Dakotas flying in from India.

The flap created by the hurried departure of the American light-plane squadron had subsided but, nevertheless, I sensed an added tension in the air which had not been there so forcibly before. All those men who knew that they must stay on that strip at all costs were hoping that the evening run of inward Dakotas would bring numbers of armed men for the defence of the place against the oncoming Jap column. They were not in the least afraid of a fight with the Japs, for they had taken part in many since they left India. But they

* See Note 13.

wanted adequate numbers to hold what they all realized was a most important position. Moreover, it was a position the defence of which demanded a different technique to that which they had made so peculiarly their own, the technique of phantom fighting in the jungle. They were adept at surprise and feint, deception and decoy, at leading the Japs a will-o'-the-wisp dance through the jungles he was trying so unsuccessfully to make his own. Now they were faced with the prospect of a siege, of being tied down to the defence of a tactically unpleasant piece of land sitting in between two parallel rows of hill which in all probability would be in the hands of the enemy. So when it came towards six o'clock and we heard the drone of engines we all looked up anxiously.

Far above, fifteen thousand feet up, there were four fighters wheeling up and down over the strip. Had we been found? Had the Japs with obvious sense sent fighters over to wait for the defenceless troop-carriers, then to sweep down on them as they came in to land? We went to earth, as it was impossible to identify them at that height. Then, while our faces were still pressed to the earth, we heard the steady roar of the Dakotas as they slipped round the edge of the hill and the first came in to land. The fighters stayed sedately upstairs.

They were Spitfires!

The first Dakota came to rest at the end of the runway in a cloud of dust. The engines were silent and an enormous figure got out of the double door at the back.

"Is Wing-Commander Russell here?" came a stentorian shout from the enormous figure. It was Fatty Pearson, C.O. of 194 Squadron and a great friend of mine. It was like seeing the Rock of Gibraltar get out of the aircraft. Beside him was Sue, the squadron mascot and pet of Squadron-Leader Frankie Bell, one of the flight commanders.

"Come on, hurry up, you old bastard; I don't like hanging around this bloody place in daytime."

The load had been discharged in a few minutes and the other aircraft were getting rid of their stuff too. I looked for signs of soldiers, but there didn't seem to be many. I felt guilty leaving all those friends there with the uncomfortable thought that any moment now they might expect attack from the air and from the ground. I said good-bye to Colonel Gaty and thanked him for his kindness and hospitality. It was like leaving a warm American home on Long Island after a good week-end.

"Glad you enjoyed it. Come again sometime!"

I pushed old Steve and his carpet slipper into the back of Fatty's Dakota and Sue hopped smartly in behind him. She ran up forward to the cockpit and sat beside Fatty in the second pilot's seat, looking very pleased with herself, as well she might with sixty operational hours over Burma to her credit.

As we pulled out of the happy valley which had been my home for a long and exciting twelve hours I looked back at the little group of men we had left behind. And then I looked over the western side of the hills where a thick tangle of forest hid that column of little yellow barbarians. It seemed odd that they should have come from so far away in Japan to fight against those men of ours, Americans and English who, too, had come so far from America and Europe to that beautiful valley with the two Burmese villages to fight each other and to kill each other. It was the sort of place which even good hunters and experienced men of the civil service in peace time would scarcely know—as if Rhodesians and Chileans had come to a wild valley in the Carpathians to fight the men of Iceland and Norway.

"See that Jap road convoy on the Homalin road?" Fatty had turned

Sue out of the second pilot's seat and we were sitting side by side. For the moment George* had taken over. Fatty broke into my thoughts and pointed out a line of lorries which were cruising quietly down a road beneath us. They couldn't be more than fifteen miles at the most from Aberdeen. It was still quite light and I wonder if they saw us. I suppose the Japs had become so used to seeing Allied aircraft over their territory they didn't even speculate on Dakotas streaming back and forth over their heads in daylight. This was a measure of our air superiority.

It was still quite light as we floated majestically over the winding ribbon of the Chindwin river which is the tactical frontier. We were flying high now to clear the barrier of the Chin hills which were rising abruptly before us beyond the Chindwin. In among the thick and mazy forest which covered these mountains like a tight coat of green were the three Jap divisions which were advancing on India. We travelled the skyways in comfort and safety. They toiled through the tracks and ravines of that inaccessible and mighty chain of hills. Their venture was doomed to fail and ours to succeed. The very nature of our paths over that space of the earth's surface must have made this clear—even to a Jap.

"I can see an aircraft ahead, Fatty."

"Where, for God's sake?" replied Fatty, as he unhooked George and took over control. We peered into the gathering dusk and, after an agonizing wait, identified the black speck which was getting larger every second as a Dakota coming towards us on the way into Burma.

"I hate seeing aircraft in daylight over this part of the world," said Fatty with a sigh of relief. So far they hadn't lost any Dakotas to Jap fighters. But it was a miracle that they hadn't met up with any yet, as they were beginning to tempt Fate by flying in daytime. There was the Spit escort, but that wasn't always about.

By now we were well over friendly country and the Imphal valley was passing slowly beneath us. To the north we could see a flare-path laid out far below on one of the strips in the valley.

"Spits," said Fatty. "I hope they don't shoot us down." Ahead, due west, the sun had sunk into Assam over the serried rows of hills which still separated us from our supper in the plains of Assam. Large thunder clouds had begun to mass in front of us, and occasionally a flash of lightning lit them up from top to bottom.

"Damn," said Fatty, "the weather's shutting down. What's our E.T.A., Eric?"

We were due in twenty-five minutes' time. There was simply the glissade down the ridges which divide Manipur from Assam out on to the plain and down on to the base strip. But it was not so simple. The monster cumulo nimbus cloud had built up to about fifteen thousand feet and was closing down like a curtain of grey-black smoke between us and the airfield seventy miles away. It was quite dark now except for the more frequent flashes of lightning, which lit up the hills and plains in brilliant purple, then closed the vision down with blinding suddenness. We altered course to try and miss the cloud but it was no good. Once I thought I could see the pale line of flares, but it was wishful thinking.

"Whizzo," said Fatty cheerfully. Then we came over it and they were only faint village lights by chance set in a straight line. The rain was thrashing on the metal fuselage and the lightning was playing grimly all round us. Soon we were utterly and hopelessly lost. I went back to find Steve, who was sitting in the back unconcerned and unaware of the situation. "We're lost, I suppose." That was all he said, and would have gone back to sleep only I thought he had

* See Note 14.

better be shown how to tie himself up, in case we had to come down. In the blackness, by lightning flashes, I showed him how the harness worked. Then I sat down for a moment and considered that this was as near as I had been to the end. I was surprised not to feel excited nor, so far as I could tell, frightened. But that may have been merely my fundamental confidence in Fatty, which was so immense that there could really be no question of my inner self feeling that the end had come.

I went up front again and looked enquiringly at Fatty. There was only one hope that had crossed my own mind. The Imphal valley had been fairly clear as we crossed over. Had the weather shut down there too? If it had, then we would inevitably run out of petrol soon and have to force land—in the hills of the North-East Frontier. If it was all right, Fatty would be able to land at one of the strips, if he could find them. Then, again, could he find the valley in this muck—it was only thirty miles long and five miles across?

I looked at the compass and saw he was trying out this one hope.

"By God, there's the lake." In a gap in the thunder-cloud far down I could just see water by a mountain-side.

Fatty roared down through the gap in the clouds and stuck to that patch of water in which a still-born moon was just reflected before the racing clouds shut again. He was down to a few feet over the ground and tearing along the valley. "Whizzo, chaps," said Fatty, wreathed in smiles. "No supper for you to-night, Sue, but we'll find you a bed somewhere, old girl."

In a minute we were over the pale outline of a strip. There was nobody about, but it was our harbour all right, even if there were hills all round and storms raging in among their summits.

"Give me the old Verey pistol, Wilf, we'll let off a rocket in case there's anyone about. I haven't enough petrol to stooge around."

The red flare rocketed out of the cabin and curved down on to the strip. There was no sign of light.

"Here goes," said Fatty, and in the darkness of the valley, with only his headlights on the wings to help him, he put us down as gently as a kiss. Sue barked. Fatty switched off. "Hope we can get a gin here," was all he said.

We got out of the big aircraft and stood on firm ground again. It was an exquisite feeling. In the darkness we could just make out the low line of the hills to the south and beyond the intermittent flash of lightning. All was quiet. There was nobody to be seen. Then the dimmed headlights of a jeep appeared at the far end of the runway. They raced towards us.

"You'd better hurry into the box.* The Japs are supposed to be only a few miles away." The defence officer spoke hurriedly and motioned us into the Jeep.

"Before we leave the strip I want a flare-path put out for the rest of my squadron. We all left Aberdeen in Burma about the same time and I'm pretty sure they haven't got through to base in this weather. How long will it take you to do it?" asked Fatty.

The defence officer raced off in his Jeep and inside ten minutes a really effective flare-path was laid along the whole length of the two-thousand-yard strip. Large, old-fashioned goose-neck flares with bright smoking flames from their oily wicks lit up that ghostly strip of broad grey earth which only the vast experience and local knowledge of Fatty had picked out of the blackness. It was a lifebelt cast on to the dark expanse of the stormy night in among those inhospitable mountains. We little knew how many crews it was to save that night.

Just as we were leaving the runway to get that eagerly awaited supper

* See Note 15.

inside the defended box there was a drone of engines and a green and red light swept past us very low. Soon after there was another and another until the whole sky above the flare-path was full of wheeling Dakotas attracted to the flame like giant moths. One by one they positioned themselves for landing and turned on their headlights. Fatty was puzzled. There were far too many of them to be from his squadron, and his relief at having, as he thought, brought them in out of the storm was short lived. But who the hell were they?

The first to land taxied fast up to where we were standing, swept its skirt round with a swish and came to a stop next to ours. Out of it dropped an excited American crew. The captain came up to us and said: "Say, fellers, where in Hell am I? Is this Comilla?" In fact Comilla was a hundred miles distant down in the plains. Between us and that place there was an eight-thousand-foot mountain barrier. Fatty explained to him where he was, but the last part of the explanation was drowned by the roar of more and more Dakotas zooming up and down the runway waiting for their turn to come in.

"The General's up there in one of those planes," the young American went on. "We were in Broadway this afternoon and ran into a God awful storm over Assam on the way home. Our base was blotted right out. It was fine having this flare-path out."

We didn't tell him how nearly it hadn't been out. Then General Old himself came up and talked to us. Fatty arranged for the refuelling and feeding of the fourteen American aircraft and their crews with the very helpful R.A.F. types on whose strip we had so inconveniently landed after office hours and while they were busy manning the walls of their fort against the Japs. In half an hour they had taken off again into the storm and made for their base. I was glad we were going to stay. The mess tent inside the box, where we were given an excellent dinner, was cosy and warm after the efforts and adventures of the day. It recalled evenings of glorious relaxation in the mountain huts of Austria and Switzerland at the end of a long day's ski-ing. After the second glass of rum I said to Fatty:

"How on earth did you find this strip in amongst all those damn hills?"

"Oh, that was easy once I saw the lake and knew we were above the valley. I had a distinct clue about Tullihal. We operated from there for the Broadway show. Not really fair was it?" and he laughed as if it hadn't quite been playing the game.

We slept on the floor of an empty tent. Outside the 'erks' and the R.A.F. regiment were standing to against the parapet, their rifles at the ready. The Jap was probably nearer to us here than he had been two hundred miles inside Burma. Such was the topsy-turvy nature of this amazing campaign. All the same I felt much better here on the floor of the tent, even though the mosquitoes bit all night.

CHAPTER XVIII

OFFSIDE AT IMPHAL

WHEN I GOT back to Comilla I heard that Wingate was dead. With him had died Stuart Emeny of the *News Chronicle* and Stanley Wills of the *Daily Herald*.

Nobody knows what happened. They took off from Imphal after dark to fly south out of the valley to their base. They were in a Mitchell twin-engined

medium bomber. Over one of the last mountain ridges the aircraft had dived into the ground. The place was not far from where Fatty Pearson and I had lost ourselves in the thunderstorm.

And so Wingate died in friendly territory among the hills and jungles over which his successful brigades had flown on the magic carpet of air transport, a carpet conjured up by his imagination and faith. The heavily laden aircraft flew night and day for many weeks over the hills where Wingate lay. His epitaph might well have been like that of Sir Christopher Wren in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral:

Si monumentum requiris, circumspice.

The operations inside northern Burma were going well. On the Indian frontier the situation was different. To those who were fortunate enough to be in the know there was nothing remotely alarming in the way the Japs were filtering through the Soma hill-tracts, flowing like a muddy monsoon stream round the Imphal valley and threatening to cut the road from Imphal to Kohima and the base station in Assam at Dimapur. But clearly to the majority, who could not appreciate all the factors, the position seemed to be going from bad to worse.

This was the situation as it must have appeared to the intelligent newspaper reader in India and in the rest of the world. We had abandoned our outposts on the Chindwin river, including a fighter strip, and had withdrawn up the only two roads—both built by ourselves—into the inner keep of the Manipur valley, of which the little capital of Imphal was our local corps H.Q. The Japs had a division outside the south wall of the fortress, at Palel, and had already sent parts of this division round to the south-west and western bastions, thus interposing troops between our garrison and the rich plains of India. In the north they were advancing in a menacing way on the road which joined Imphal with Dimapur due north, a road which ran parallel with the advancing Jap line and so lay open to attack all along its hundred and twenty miles of length. If the Japs could get possession of the Imphal valley, rich in rice, food, and airstrips, they would be able to threaten Bengal and Assam from a comfortable platform. If they could get into the plain at Dimapur they could cut off Stilwell, who was pushing his fist into the face of their 18th Division back inside the Hukong valley, dislocate the 'Hump'* traffic to China and erupt by land into teeming north-east India. It was a rather frightening prospect—on paper. And paper was all that the average person had at his disposal for placing this invasion of India in perspective.

This was the situation as seen by General Gifford, the commander-in-chief of the army group. Soon after I got back to Delhi he gave a Sunday morning conference to war correspondents, but asked them for the time being not to write dispatches based on his picture. The onward march of the three Jap divisions suited our plans admirably. They were marching into another trap, an even bigger one than in Arakan, and, like the trap at Arakan, it was to be made possible by air power.

At that very moment the 5th Indian Division, under Major-General Briggs, was being flown in Dakotas and Commandos of Troop-Carrier Command from the Arakan to Dimapur. Within a few hours one whole infantry division with animal transport and ancillary services had been carried several hundred miles from one part of the front to another. It was the first time that a division

* See Note 16.

had been moved so far during a battle and with such speed. And so the situation, as General Gifford outlined it to us that Sunday morning, was really more like this.

We held the Imphal Valley in great strength, with tanks, artillery, infantry, and a very superior air force. In the valley we had day-fighters, night-fighters, fighter-bombers, and supply carriers. In the Assam plains, seventy miles to the west, we had many more of all varieties, including Vengeance dive-bombers. We were sure that if the road to Kohima was cut the Dakotas would be able to provision the beleaguered fortress indefinitely. There would be Jap fighters to contend with, but not many. Thus if the Japs penetrated into the fort we would then meet them with superior armour and air on a dry flat plain. If they cut the life-line road we would supply the garrison by air. If they broke out into the Assam plain we would hit them with the 5th Indian Division and other forces which were already massing at Dimapur. In two months the rains would begin to descend in torrents and the Japs would find the jungle tracks leading back to their bases in Burma flooded and washed away. They would begin to run out of food and ammunition. We should then mop them up at our leisure. It didn't sound an exciting strategy but it was the only one which promised success. General Gifford said the process would take six weeks. It took two and a half months, but it succeeded beyond all hopes. It was a demonstration of the new tactics by means of which the apparently besieged garrison in fact besieged their attackers. For it was the apparently besieged who held the invisible sky routes in their hands and whose air forces could disrupt the earthly lines of communication of our arrogant and oddly stupid foe. It was another step forward in the air transport war to which the Japs, as they say in the R.A.F., 'hadn't a clue'.

It was shortly after my return to Delhi that we had the big censorship flap which caused much heart-burning and raised some dust even in the House of Commons.

The Jap division in the north had made sensational strides forward after his capture of our outpost north-east of Imphal, the small village of Ukhrul. He had wasted no time and instead of pushing down the hill road towards Imphal, which we pardonably believed would be his next move, he turned away from the walls of our valley fortress and struck like lightning at the thin life-line of the road to Dimapur. He went for the one key-point on that road, the village of Kohima, headquarters of the district and home of the Commissioner, whose house and tennis-court were to become head-line news, as familiar to newspaper readers and future military historians as La Haye Sainte farm at Waterloo and the monastery at Cassino.

So swift was the advance of the Jap 31st Division that they reached the outskirts of Kohima before we had been able to put in a force of regular troops sufficient to ensure holding it. And it was imperative that it should be held. If the Japs could sit in Kohima astride the road at this point where it began to descend into the Assam plain, they would accomplish the double task of cutting off Imphal from the outside world—we were prepared for that—but they would be sitting on the rim of the inner bastion of India, as it were, swinging their legs over the wall on the inside, in a position to jump down into north-eastern India whenever it should suit them best.

It was at this juncture that the West Kents, a detachment of the Assam Rifles and convalescing officers and men, nursing orderlies and the administrative troops stationed at this hill camp in the lovely and invigorating climate of the Naga hills took up arms—which many of them were in little case fit

to bear—and fought off the Japs until they could be relieved from Dimapur. In this classic siege at an outpost of empire, of which nobody at that time had ever heard, the infuriated Japs struggled to gain this vital village perched on its series of ridges astride the Imphal road. They won a number of ridges but they never gained the whole of the place and they never took the Commissioner's bungalow and his famous tennis-court—which was ploughed up more than once in the course of the battle by tanks of both sides.

The siege of Kohima and its recapture by British and Indian troops was one of the epics in the campaign. In April, tanks churned their way across the Commissioner's tennis-court and blasted the Japs from their fox-holes in his kitchen garden. The ridges were stormed in some of the bloodiest fighting of the war and by early May we were again in possession of this key-point. It was not until June that other road blocks between Imphal and Kohima were removed and the road was cleared, but the threat to India and General Stilwell's supply lines was removed with the securing of Kohima. In a sense it was the turning point of the campaign and when it happened General Gifford's strategy was justified. For in the meantime, from the beginning of April to the middle of June, Imphal was cut off from all ground communication with the outside world. But it was kept in full fighting order and bubbling spirits by the daily and nightly stream of Troop-Carrier Command Dakotas which slipped through the V-shaped pass on the southern edge of the saucer until the Japs investing the fort could be starved and fought into submission by our ground forces operating both from inside and outside the keep.

Just before the Japs had cut the Imphal-Dimapur road, I tried to help Richard Sharpe of the B.B.C. and Dossu Karaka, a young Indian correspondent of the Nationalist *Bombay Chronicle*, to get into the valley by air, as we all thought that the land route was by then impossible.

Dossu Karaka was the first Indian ever to become President of the Oxford Union. It had taken him nearly ten years to get over it. A Parsee, son of a respected member of the I.C.S., he returned to India in the early thirties a victim of the *malaise* of those unhappy times made worse by the miserable Indian political situation. Dossu would probably have matured soon after reaching India and settled down to the constructive writing of which he is certainly capable. As it was he gravitated quickly to the Nationalist Press and for several years wrote a witty but embittered personal column in the *Bombay Chronicle*. For a long time after the war began Ivor Jehu would not accredit him as a war correspondent, since Dossu and his editor in some odd way imagined that it was the duty of G.H.Q. not only to accredit correspondents but also to pay them and send them, preferably, to the Russian front. For long he harboured dreadful thoughts on this account and went so far as to write a pamphlet worthy of Scarron or Tom Paine entitled, *Karaka hits Propaganda*. He devoted two-thirds of it to an attack on Ivor and called Roger Falk, whom he had never met, one of the most promising young Englishmen in the country. He never gave me a mention, which confirmed my suspicion that I would never be a good publicist. Then one day either he or his editor, the famous Mr. Brelvi, discovered that newspapers have to pay for their war correspondents and that they can cover any front in the world almost, except the Russian, provided they can afford the expense. So one day in March—to his surprise—Dossu suddenly found himself with a correspondent's card signed by Ivor in one hand and an R.A.F. priority for the Assam front in the other.

I met him in the Press camp in Comilla after getting back from Burma. He will never like me for saying it, but I thought he was a changed man. He

had been at the front for several weeks and in the company of many of the seasoned war correspondents of the English and American Press. He had seen war at first hand and he had seen and met British and Indian soldiers and officers fighting a hard war against the barbarous Jap, the plausible little man whom many Indian Nationalists sitting in the detachment of their party meetings a thousand miles and more behind the Fourteenth Army thought would be no worse and possibly better than the hated British. He had found the kindness and comradeship which always marks the fighting man and which is generously given by every soldier to writers who share his hardships and his dangers. All this, I think, had wrought the change, and it was a pleasure to try to introduce both Dossu and Richard Sharpe into Imphal in my little Fairchild Argus. Sadly, the weather was too bad, and although the attempt was determined enough it didn't come off and they were eventually forced to travel three days in a train and go in with the last road convoy to get through from Dimapur for nearly three months. They came out by air, and Dossu went back to Bombay where his rivals and enemies launched a silly campaign against him in the Press, accusing him of writing his dispatches in the bars of Calcutta. I think it was a change to have people criticizing him, as he had so often criticized others. Dossu had seen the real thing for himself and I think he may have understood more clearly that the Indian problem is not the false simplification which it is so often presented of callous Englishmen holding down a helpless continent. If the Japs were in New Delhi I doubt whether the *Bombay Chronicle* would be able to feature a daily column attacking the government. These things are easier to comprehend at the front than in any bar, as his critics might have known. During his time at the front he naturally gravitated towards the I.A.F. squadrons, which were, in point of fact, the only all-Indian units in any of the Services. I was immensely glad about this, as one of Dossu's bitterest complaints had always been against the young Indian who joined the Services and became 'a mercenary'.

He now set himself to write colourful dispatches about the valour of these young Indian air crews with as much vigour as he had previously attacked them. On one memorable occasion he was able to scoop the rest of the correspondents over Mehar Singh's D.S.O. Mehar Singh had commanded 6 Squadron I.A.F. all through the campaign; it was a Tac R squadron equipped with Hurricane II Bs. He had led his young and, for the most part, inexperienced Indian pilots with tremendous verve and skill. To wind up his season he rescued one of his pilots in cowboy fashion from under the noses of the Japs.

One of his pilots ran out of petrol on a recce flight in Arakan over the enemy lines. He managed to put his Hurricane down in a small paddy field without damaging it very badly, but he was within half a mile of the Jap positions. His companion marked the field and flew back with the news to Mehar Singh at Cox's Bazaar. The rugged Sikh lost no time in putting a remarkable plan into operation. He put some petrol into the back seat of a Tiger Moth, ordered the squadron up into the air to give him cover, and flew off to the field where the stranded Hurricane was sitting waiting to be picked up by the Japs.

Mehar Singh circled the tiny field once and then put the diminutive trainer down by the side of the Hurricane. The squadron wheeled about over the field giving cover. Mehar Baba, as he is always known, inspected the Hurricane—there was a large hole in the starboard wing where a bush had poked itself through the leading edge, and there were six inches off the three blades of the air-screw. He looked at the five hundred yards of rough ground which was

all he had to play with for take-off. Then he made up his mind, put the petrol into the Hurricane, its young pilot into the Moth, and in a few moments he was roaring and bumping over the paddy and had lifted the fighter by sheer strength and courage over the bund at the edge of the field. The Moth took off behind and the whole *cortège* flew triumphantly home to base.

It was while Dossu Karaka was on the station that the great event took place. The Indian Air Force won its first D.S.O. A signal came through that a V.I.P. was on the way and everyone was to stand by. In half an hour Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin landed and the squadron was paraded on the strip. 'Jacky' Baldwin then pinned the red and blue ribbon on Meher Singh's bush shirt. So the young Indian war correspondent was the first civilian to know about this historic event and to see it take place.

A few weeks later another Sikh squadron commander won the D.F.C. and bar in the short space of a month and within a few weeks of bringing his squadron to the front. Arjun Singh, like Meher Singh, had been at Cranwell and was one of the regulars of the I.A.F. I remember talking to him at Kohat, on the North-west Frontier, in the winter of 1943 when his squadron was keeping the tribesmen in order among those forbidden hills. I flew there with Sir John Baldwin, and during our whole stay at Kohat he never ceased to badger Sir John to be allowed to take his squadron to the north-east frontier. He was fed-up with the tribes and wanted to get at the Japs. I believe he had been even more importunate when Sir Richard Peirse had visited Peshawar a little earlier. He had flown over the Kohat Pass to Peshawar in his Hurricane to plead in person with the C-in-C. to be allowed to go to war. Sir Richard sent him and his boys—as soon as other squadrons could be brought up—to the North West, and within a few weeks of getting to Imphal he had got himself a D.F.C. and bar. Such spirit is the answer to all those impenitent and traditional carpers and critics who seem convinced that Indians by themselves cannot be relied upon for courage, drive, and skill. It is, of course, impossible to generalize, but, given the right chances of training and character-building, the sky is the limit for Indians too.

CHAPTER XIX

OPERATION DOUGHNUT

AT LAST THE time had come for Operation Doughnut, that trip which Charles Gardner and I had planned but never been able to carry out. It was to be my last tour of India before coming home, and we planned it so that we finished up the tour on the Burma-Assam front. Air Vice-Marshal Baker allowed me to take a Percival Proctor, which was much faster than an Argus and more suited to our purpose. We were one team of a number of the staff officers of S.E.A.C. and the Air Command who elected to fly themselves down to Ceylon on the occasion of the removal of S.E.A.C. to Kandy from New Delhi. The three teams were Air Marshal Sir Guy Garrod, Sir Richard Peirse's deputy; Air Vice-Marshal Whitworth Jones, and ourselves. As was fitting, the Air Marshal finished first by many lengths, completing the fifteen-hundred-mile course well inside the day. He was flying a Bisley and was navigated by Duncan Braithwaite, his P.A. Air Vice-Marshal Whitworth Jones was second, having

flogged his Proctor for over a thousand miles on the first day; Charles and I were a bad third, as we had to linger for a day in Bombay.

We took off in the early morning from that strip at Juhu, where two years before Johnny Johnson and I had flown so many patrols seawards in our Wapitis. Now Catalinas and Wellingtons were doing the job properly. There were many memories as we sailed over the harbour by Prongs light 'between the palms and the sea where the world-end steamers wait'. At Belgaum there was such a large airfield—where in the old days I had been used to land in a field—that for five minutes I couldn't tell where we were. We refuelled and flew through the heat haze of central India to Bangalore, where I put the tiny low-wing monoplane on the two thousand yards of fine concrete which swallowed us up, like a fly landing on a table-cloth. It felt absurd to taxi for nearly a mile up an arterial highway to the control tower.

Next day we fled over the high mountains of south India and I looked out to starboard in the direction of Cochin. We landed near the golden temple at Trichinopoly, hard by the rock and the sacred tanks. Then Charles took our little steed on the last lap to his home waters of Ceylon and we hopped across the sandy islets which stretch from Danushcodi to Talaiminnar, the chain of gold which ties the lovely island of the south to the foot of Hindoostan. We chased the ripples on the deep blue waters down Dutch and Portugal Bay and I looked vainly for elephants in the impenetrable woods which stretch up to the water-line over the whole of northern Ceylon. In an hour we were over that famous race-course where at Easter time, 1942, a squadron of Hurricanes had risen from the paddocks and grandstands to give the Japs their very first sock on the nose in the Indian theatre. We landed at Ratmalana.

After a week in Kandy, Charles and I came down the hill in an R.A.F. P.R. Jeep. We gave a lift to a young American A.P. correspondent, Frank Martin, with whom we had an argument all the way down to Colombo. The argument itself is of little consequence now, save that its very occurrence disturbed me more than somewhat, as Damon Runyan would say.

The American correspondents very naturally found the colourful personality of Colonel Cochrane an ideal one on which to hang much of the publicity of the airborne landings in Burma. Nobody could possibly grudge either Cochrane or America this publicity, which was complementary in every sense to that which Wingate had received. Charles Gardner and I did find it hard to believe all the same that General Arnold had sent the swashbuckling and adventurous young ace to the Burma theatre because he was dissatisfied with the performance of the Tenth American Air Force, and that his independent status had been deliberately insisted upon so that, in the words of this correspondent, "he could show the Tenth Air Force how to beat the Japs". Whatever may have been General Arnold's reasons for sending Cochrane to Assam as an independent commander I am certain that this was not one of them. The argument ceased to be academic when Martin suggested that the arrival of the Spitfires on the jungle strip of Broadway in advance of the Mustangs of Cochrane's Commandos was in some way an encroachment on the latter's preserves, in fact on Cochrane's strip. There was a suggestion that this arrival had more to do with publicity than with military manœuvre and necessity. By the time we reached the Galle Face Hotel, as the sun was dipping into the Indian Ocean, we were all three as cool as the evening breeze and probably better friends than when we set off. But it is difficult to dissipate the curtain of misunderstanding which seems so much heavier and so much deeper between the Americans and ourselves in India than anywhere else.

We left Ceylon just after the Sabang raid by a composite force of American and British carriers with heavy supporting units. The actual damage done to the small harbour at the north-western tip of Sumatra was probably not very great, but the significance of the operation was considerable. We had taken a heavy naval task force into the narrow waters which should by rights have been dominated by the enemy's shore-based Jap aircraft. An American correspondent—who was in an American ship—told me he thought we had not yet learned sufficiently the lessons of American carrier actions in the Pacific where the 'flat tops'* race for the striking-point under cover of night, launch their aircraft, take them in again and race out of range of enemy shore-based air attack as fast as they can. He seemed to think that our more casual and dignified approach and withdrawal might have had disturbing consequences, but they didn't, and the few enemy aircraft which chased us out to sea were overwhelmed. It seems hardly likely that we should risk a repetition of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*.

We flew in our Proctor from Ceylon back to the mainland and headed up the east coast of India towards Calcutta, about fourteen hundred miles away. The weather in late April was intensely hot and we flew bare to the waist. After Madras the haze became thicker than ever and the heat intolerable so that by five in the afternoon we were pretty well done in. We saw a long strip of concrete out in the blue which looked quite deserted, but we were so tired out that we flopped down and decided to stay the night there, even if we had to sleep by the side of the runway. As it turned out there was somebody there, one lonely Sikh officer of the Indian Air Force who was in charge of a care and maintenance party on this enormous airfield, waiting for the time when it might have to be used in operations. There were many such airfields in the lay-back areas of India, built by the forethought of Air Vice-Marshal Collier in those hectic days when the Japs were at the gates and our beaten air force was straggling back into Calcutta from Burma.

This strip with buildings and dispersals was quite empty but ready to take seventy-five officers and a thousand men at a moment's notice; indeed, it looked like a deserted city, a modern Fathipur Sikri, and we, like tourists, come unexpectedly upon it. It was, I think, the hottest place I have been in. The Sikh officer was as homesick for the rich plains and cold climate of his native Punjab as we were for England; and his Kashmiri servant considered the place more benighted than the most nostalgic exile from the West could have done. So we were all bound together by a bond of relative misery intensified by the airless heat and the all-pervading greyness of the atmosphere. As the sun went down it looked in truth like a ball of steel, and we all three lay out in the open on Indian string beds, gasping for the air which would not return for many weeks. But a miracle happened. The Sikh officer produced iced beer.

Over the precious cans of cold lager, stretched out in deck-chairs under the night sky, Charles and I talked of our respective careers. He had become a well-known journalist and broadcaster. After the war he would undoubtedly become more famous still with the experiences of his wartime career in the R.A.F. as a valuable increase in the capital value of his knowledge. In some ways I envied him the excitement and travel and atmosphere of great events in which a journalist lives and works. On the other hand my conventional education had made that career a difficult one in which to feel at home, and I praised the more solid and dull furnishings of a business life. We had known each other well for some time, but as so often in war time it takes discomfort,

* See Note 17.

or wild and lonely surroundings for men to open up to one another about their personal beliefs and their private lives. We talked, too, of the ways in which our lives after the war would be safeguarded for the future, so that they could be lived without the constant fear of war and destruction. If we were to think no further than of settling back to our pre-war lives surely there would arise another international crisis, another resurgence of that insane German love of war and conquest. Yet if we would be forced to take a more active part in politics, all of us, in order to make certain that we should never be betrayed by our laziness or stupidity into another twenty years of muddle and improvisation, surely our private lives would be so interfered with as to make them scarcely worth living? The compromise between regimentation and vigilance which, I suppose, is the core of our post-war problem, kept us talking late into that stifling night in the empty, squeezed-out air of eastern India. Next even we were in Calcutta, all set to fly up to the front where Fatty Pearson was expecting us.

We had parked the Proctor away and were sitting in the basha mess of Fatty's squadron at Agartala, a big station in the middle of the Assam plains in one of the small principalities which abound in those parts. The Rajah's big white palace served as a magnificent landmark to the returning Dakotas in bad weather. We had been joined by Andrew Rice, newly arrived from Naples, a witty and experienced journalist who, before the war, had been on the staff of the *Yorkshire Post*. He had been the first P.R.O. to set foot in North Africa on D Day, and had followed the campaign up to Naples from Algiers.

As we sat in the comfortable chairs of Fatty's mess, looking out over the wide grass enclosure in the centre of which his pet bear, Rupert, was chained to a tree, I asked him about the events of the few weeks which had intervened since our last adventure together. Fatty brought us up to date.

Aberdeen, where I had spent that exciting twelve hours behind the Jap lines, had been attacked from the air very shortly after we had left. It had been an exciting twenty minutes and a great victory for the light ack-ack defences. A dozen Oscar fighters had swept along the strip and had been engaged by everything we had. Three of them had been shot down and the rest had cleared off. Then, after about ten minutes, one of the Oscars limped back to the strip with its engine on fire. The pilot was below a thousand feet. He rolled the aircraft on to its back and baled out, landing with a bump on the strip and hurting himself pretty badly. He was captured at once and to everyone's amazement said he thought he was over his own territory. He was over the only patch of earth for miles and miles which didn't belong to the Japs, a valley which a few minutes previously he had been attacking. They are most unpredictable people, the Japanese. After this Aberdeen had been attacked often, but it was still in use and we were landing there at night, which Fatty didn't like at all. He told us how Franky Bell, his senior flight-commander, had nearly been lost there a few nights previously.

Franky, it appeared, had been taking in a load of Gurkhas. There was no moon. He had a number of other Dakotas from the squadron with him and it was more than likely that there would be other troop-carrying aircraft, both American and British, from other fields operating here all through the night. They had flown over the mountains all right and had crossed the silver ribbon of the Chindwin, the frontier line. Franky had approached Aberdeen fairly high, about five thousand feet, and when he was over the valley he switched on his wing-tip lights as a warning of his approach to Colonel Gaty on the strip below. As he glided gently down in a wide circle he noticed the red and

green navigation lights of another aircraft forming on him as he came down. He paid no attention. Then in a flash red-hot streaks of tracer began to stream past his windows and he could feel strikes on the large hull behind. It was a Jap night-fighter who had lain in wait for him and had come alongside in the brazenly successful guise of a friendly aircraft. Franky had no defence, one of his engines was shot away and the other damaged, but he kept on and landed the large, crippled aircraft on the strip with the Oscar pelting him from behind for all it was worth. He swung the Dakota off the strip, so that it should not block the runway, ran into a tree and just avoided a bomb which the Jap fighter dropped ahead of him on the runway. Nobody was hurt by the crash-landing, but seven of the Gurkhas had been killed by the fighter's bullets.

It was difficult to get an accurate picture of the fighting inside Burma by the Chindits, either from Fatty or from any of the operations rooms at Fourteenth Army H.Q. Salient features were undoubtedly the success of Stilwell and Merrill, with American and Chinese troops, who were fighting their way quickly down the Hukong Valley in the north towards Myitkyina, and the successful road and rail block established by Brigadier Calvert with his division, which had been landed at Broadway early in March. They had blown the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway in many places and established an almost impregnable road block from which the Japs were vainly trying to dislodge them with a special force. Others were moving north-east towards Myitkyina with the intention of joining Stilwell's forces coming down from the north-west and together capturing Myitkyina and Mogaung, the key-places to northern Burma. Bernard Fergusson's brigade—which had walked across the Chindwin—was fighting hard round the triangle of Indaw, in the centre of northern Burma, astride the communications of the three Jap divisions now attacking India a hundred and twenty miles to the west.

Thus it was a confused picture still, and one difficult to appreciate by observers many miles away in India and Europe. It was as if two teams of soccer players insisted, despite the referee, on continually playing off-side with two balls. We were attacking the Jap goal-mouth at Myitkyina with about half our team and only the Jap goalie and full-backs in front of their goal; the rest of his team was behind ours attacking our goal-mouth with another ball. The main difference was that on the whole we had more than eleven men in our team against all the traditions of the game, and our goal-mouth, the Imphal Valley, was protected by a pretty complete set of halves, backs, and forwards. The point of this simile is that large portions of the opposing armies were fighting with their backs to one another, a confusing method of waging war and one not likely to be successful unless one side or the other had a very good reason for doing so. Our good reason was, of course, air power; air power as represented among many others by the massive figure of Alec Pearson and his magnificent crews of Canadian and British airmen. Around the Imphal Valley at this time, the beginning of May, the Japs appeared to be in a good position. They had managed to worm a considerable number of troops round the back of the valley on to the hair-raising mountain track, which had been built a year earlier by an enterprising sapper, connecting the valley with the Assam plain due west at Silchar. We were trying to dislodge them, but so far had not been successful. On the Imphal road, although we had retaken Kohima, there were still a number of road blocks between it and Imphal, so that the garrison was still cut off from the outside world and was being supplied entirely by the British and American Dakotas.

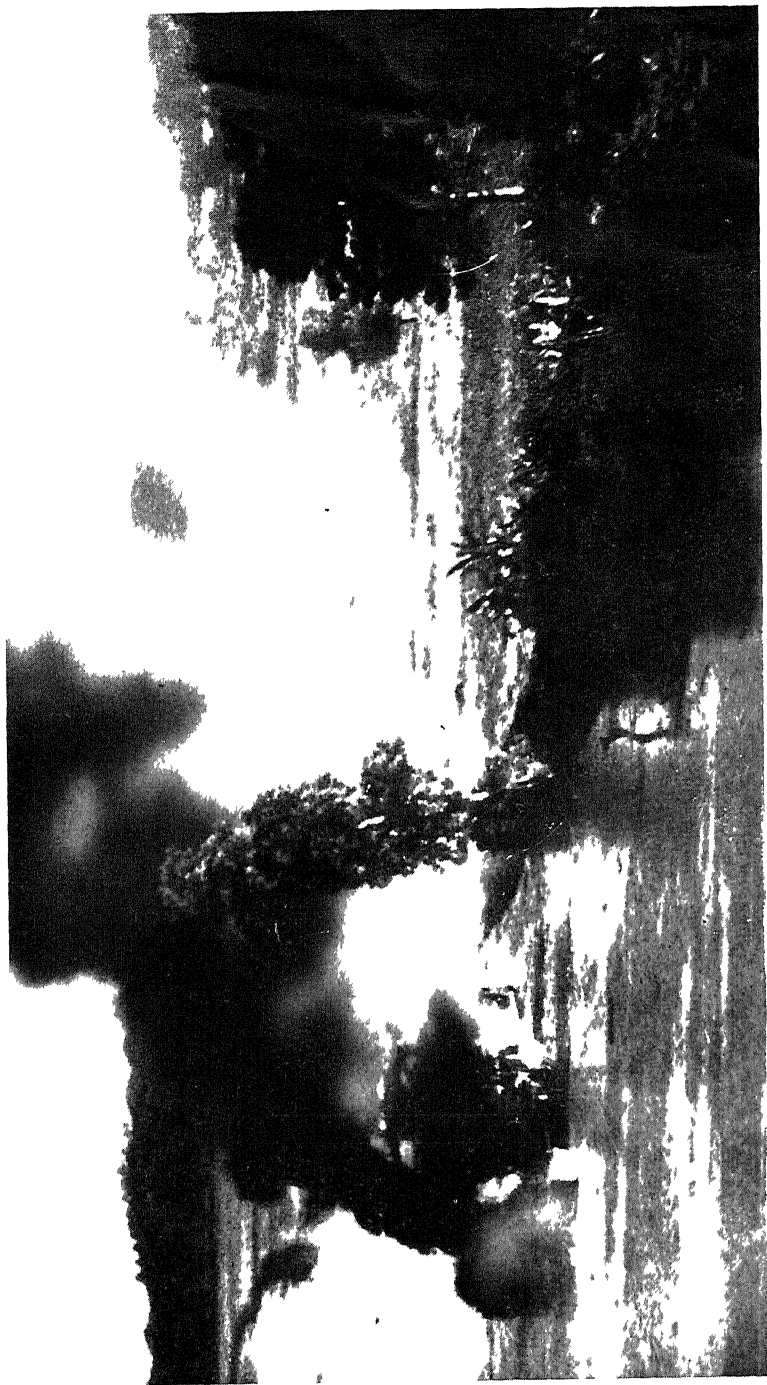
Alec was going in himself on the daily shuttle-service the next day and

offered to take us with him. It was not as easy as it sounded, for there were two factors which had to be considered. The first was the weather, which was beginning to cloud up badly as the monsoon approached, making flying among those mountains an unpleasant business. The second was the enemy air force, which, although soundly beaten by the Third Tactical Air Force, still managed occasionally to slip through a patrol of fighters on to the route which the unarmed Dakotas had to follow into the valley and then pounce on them with devastating effect. Their favourite practice was to fly in formations of three below the level of the hills so as to avoid our radar posts and visual spotting from the Imphal plain, then they would patrol up and down the narrow Bandits Valley which ran parallel to the Imphal Valley, but which was much narrower and had to be crossed by the Dakotas on their way in to the fortress. If they cruised up and down this blind alley long enough they were bound to catch some Dakotas as they came through with their loads of supplies and men. Only a week before, Alec told us, we had lost seven Dakotas, including one from his own squadron, which had been a few minutes ahead of him on the long run-in. This was, of course, to encourage us. We felt all right in the comfort of the mess as Alec ordered another pink gin all round, but I knew that I for one should feel a bit different on the morrow.

We took off from Agartala at dawn, Charles, Andrew Rice, and I each in a separate Dakota. I sat by Alec's side as I had done on several occasions earlier; again I felt the same feeling of confidence which some men are able to convey in almost tangible form by sheer force of personality. As the heavily-laden Dakota rose steadily through the overcast which covered the flat plain like a grey sheet at less than a thousand feet he spoke of the wonderful work which was being done by his squadron in this battle. His crews were averaging a hundred hours' flying every month, which is considerable for transport pilots in peace time. But this flying was as nerve-racking as any in the world and much of it was done at night. One crew, Canadians, had flown ninety-eight hours at night during the previous month. Nearly all of it was over enemy-held country, where they might expect to meet Jap fighters at any moment. All they had in the way of defence were two Browning .303 machine-guns mounted in the rear of the fuselage and firing through the windows. Every time they went out they had to land many miles behind the enemy lines or in the beleaguered fortress of Imphal into which they were now flying through the gathering wrack of monsoon clouds and sudden thunderstorms. So far no members of the squadron had been decorated since its formation under Alec over two years previously. I said I was certain that before this campaign was over they would have all the gongs they wanted. They certainly deserved more than could possibly come their way.

I looked out through the wide perspex window. We were rising majestically among the mountainous layers of gathering grey cumulus. Away to the right I could see another Dakota riding high through the colonnades and cathedrals which rose on all sides. There was an occasional glimpse of the ground through the grey sheet below. Now the mountains were beginning and Alec decided to come down so that he could fly in between the hill-tops. It was safer—provided the clouds allowed.

The weather cleared a bit as we came down. Soon we were turning and twisting between ravines and gorges with the green hill-tops above our wings on either side. The aircraft seemed so much bigger and more unwieldy at this height. The wing-tips shivered in the air currents and we strained our eyes up and down the valleys, on the look-out for Jap fighters. Soon we should

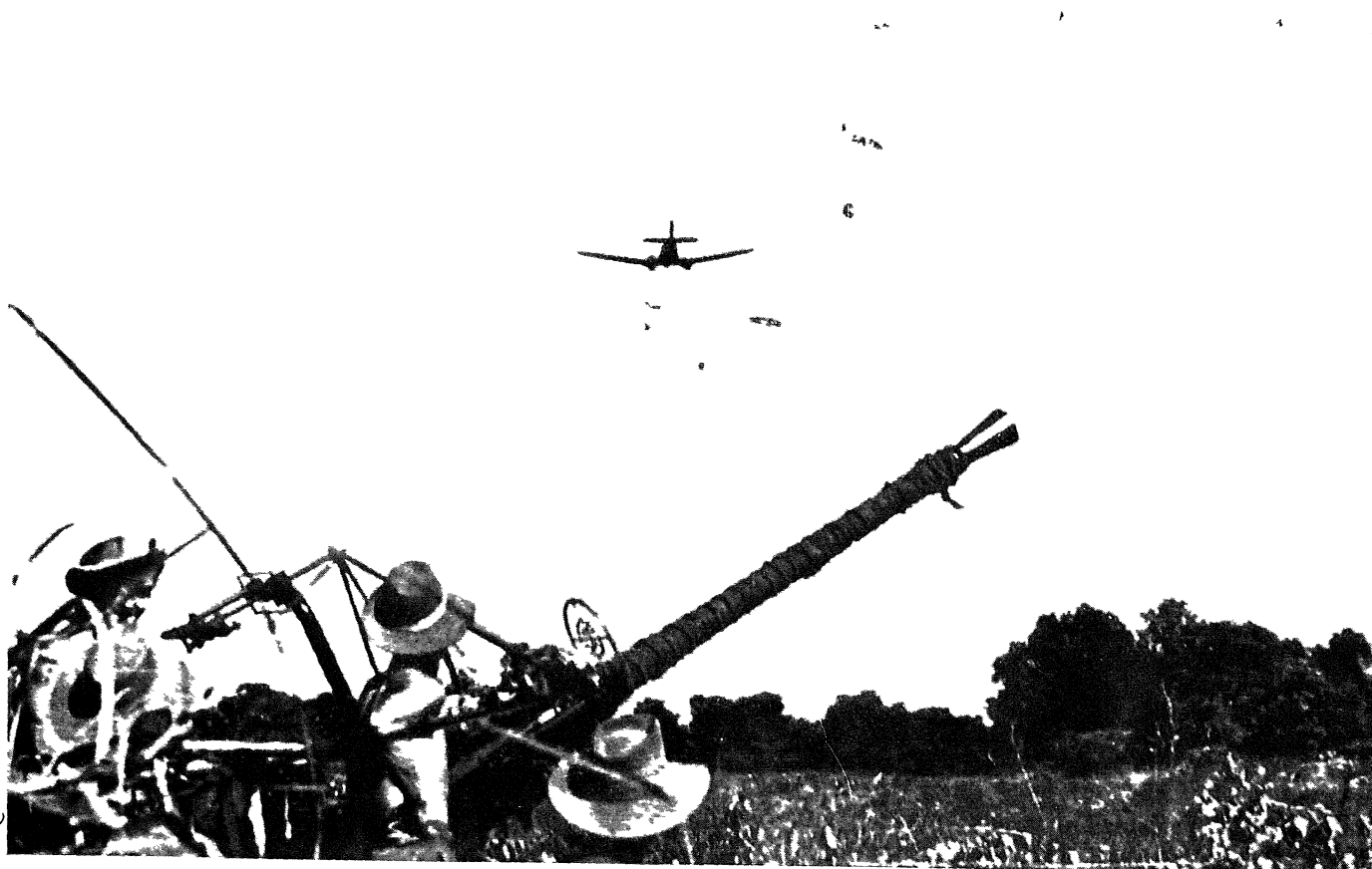


PICTURE TAKEN BY A BEAUFIGHTER PILOT OF A LARGE IRRAWADDY STEAMER AND TWO BARGES AFTER HE HAD ATTACKED IT
AND SET IT ON FIRE

These steamers were of great value to the Japs and many of them were destroyed or fatally damaged by the Beaufighters.



A SUPPLY DROP OVER JAP-HELD NORTHERN BURMA AS SEEN FROM ONE OF THE DROPPING AIRCRAFT
Ground troops can be seen on the sandbank in the middle of the river, and another dropping aircraft gaining height towards the top of the picture.



A SUPPLY DROP AS SEEN FROM THE GROUND
This picture was taken during the 1944 air invasion of Northern Burma, and shows supplies being dropped from a Dakota to East Africans who are well behind the Jap front line.



WING-COMMANDER ALEC PEARSON, D.F.C.,
who commanded 194 Squadron R.A.F. (known to the Fourteenth Army and its numerous friends as 'the friendly firm') during 1943 and 1944. This picture was taken at Imphal during the siege in 1944. He was killed early in 1945 at Biggin Hill.

be in Bandits' Valley. There would be a quick scramble to get across it and then we should slip over the hill, through the V-shaped pass, and would ride out into the comparative safety of the Imphal Valley.

"Look out on your side for bandits and I'll look out this side. If you see anything, shout." My throat was rather dry and my heart beat faster. We were such a sitting target and without any soldiers in the back, there wasn't even anybody manning the two pop-guns.

"Here we are. Keep your eyes skinned." Fatty peered through the window on his side and kept his hands on the throttles. I stared hard up the narrow valley which stretched away into the tangle of mountain and jungle to my right. I strained hard to see three little black dots which could so soon become three whirling and twisting low-wing monoplanes. Then we were over and I could almost stretch out and touch the grassy slopes of the little col through which we squeezed into the broad and comfortable expanse of the Imphal Valley.

Alec eased back the throttles and we both looked relieved and happy. The big machine only had about three miles to glide down before the faintly Burmese-looking market town of Imphal came up to meet us. We eased round in a wide, shallow sweep over the broad earth-strip at Kanglataungbi and landed smoothly in a flurry of dust among the countless aircraft of all descriptions which lined this wide and important piece of earth.

Alec had several trips to do that day, in and out of the fort, fetching and carrying everything from Jeeps to K rations, so we agreed to stay in Imphal and go back with him on his last trip. We walked up the runway in the direction of the H.Q. of a fighter squadron just as it landed from an operation. Twelve Hurricanes came streaking in at break-neck speed. We were covered in their dust.

We lost no time in finding the fighter squadron's H.Q., and the flight-commander took us along to his billet in a farmer's barn where he gave us a tremendous breakfast. We had a talk about the Jap air force. This fighter-pilot had great respect for the Japs as air fighters, even though we had dominated them to such a great extent on this front in recent weeks. He still thought that the Jap army and navy fighter, the famous army OI and navy Zero, were the most manoeuvrable fighters in any of the world's air forces, and he had fought in Europe against the best of the *Luftwaffe*.

"I saw an Oscar the other day make the biggest sort of a fool of a Spit," he said. "Of course he couldn't do much to the Spit, but he broke away just whenever he pleased by climbing up into a loop and rolling off the top. Then he kind of stood still and watched the Spit rush past. You see, they have such terrific manoeuvrability and rate of turn that they can run circles round us. Only, of course, they can't come near us for speed and fire-power."

He was a tall and shy New Zealander, but he opened up as he got on to what was evidently his favourite subject. He wanted the Air Ministry to design a radial-engined fighter of great manoeuvrability to compete with the Jap low-wing monoplanes. If they couldn't do that he thought the F.W. 190*—after we had beaten the Germans—would be the most suitable weapon to bring against the Japs. It was an interesting talk and a good check on what was tending to become over-optimism in the air dispatches from this front.

We finished our eggs on the doorstep of his farmhouse behind a prickly cactus hedge and returned to the strip where the squadron intelligence officer took us into his room on wheels and showed us the army dispositions. The Jap H.Q. were quite close in the key-village of Ukhrul. There were many others

* See Note 18.

spread out along the Imphal-Kohima road. At the south end of the valley—about twenty miles from us—we were holding the fine airstrip of Palel but were not using it for aircraft, as it was being sniped and mortared by the Japanese. At several places round the perimeter of the valley small probing parties of Japs had entered the plain but were quickly wiped out and retired in discomfort. Everywhere we were holding them and everywhere, with the help of the Hurri-bombers and the Vengeance dive-bombers, we were beating them up if they emerged on to the open ground. We were making their tenure of the foothills on the edge of the valley extremely uncomfortable. There seemed to be no move of major importance on at the moment except the slow advance by Scottish and Indian troops up the road past our airfield towards Ukhrul, where we were evidently aiming to capture the Jap H.Q. and thus disrupt their general strategy.

Meanwhile the air supply went on and the unceasing stream of Dakotas and Commandos, some with the big white star on their bellies and some the blue and white roundel, kept taking off and landing on the strip.

We walked back and watched the changing scene at the arrival and departure platform. There was an R.A.F. Dakota disgorging with difficulty a Jeep; another was taking on board a weary but cheerful looking company of Bernard Fergusson's Brigade which had been flown out after its long march into the heart of north Burma and its heavy fighting round Indaw. They were thin and bearded but successful. Farther down the line rations and ammunition were being unloaded with great speed from another aircraft and loaded into trucks which had been smartly backed up to the large double doors before the engines had even been switched off. There was cheerfulness and bustle in the air. It was not the atmosphere one might have expected in a beleaguered town. It was the unexpressed, inexpressible confidence of an army with a new technique. Mirabeau said wisely of Germany that she was an army with a country, not a country with an army. The Fourteenth Army in Burma was an army with an air force, not an army and an air force; the Troop-Carrier Command and the Fourteenth Army were in spirit as fused together as a pair of oarsmen. Some critics said this fusion was a bad thing and that no army should come to rely on the air supply force to the extent of the Fourteenth Army. This view was, I think, advanced with the motive of ensuring that complete dependence on air supply did not develop, as it well might, into abuse of aircraft by lazy and unthinking freight planning. It is so easy for men who have not been brought up with aircraft and their numerous problems of maintenance, to overtax them when other means of transport are as effective, if less convenient and spectacular. But in this theatre air supply was the key to victory, and criticism, if it was to be at all valid, should have been levelled at the detailed methods of its day-to-day employment rather than at the general principle of air supply; and the detailed methods of day-to-day employment were, of course, the concern of the army, not the air force.

A good example of this sometimes faulty and casual freight planning, which led many critics in the air force to assume that the army was becoming dangerously dependent on air supply, was taking place under our very eyes. Alec Pearson had just landed from his second trip. He had brought with him this time two Jeeps which had just been lowered down the ramp and were being driven away by Indian drivers. They had scarcely disappeared when a young British subaltern drove up in another Jeep which he placed carefully in position at the bottom of the loading ramp. Alec raised his eyebrows and asked what it was all about.

"I've managed to win this Jeep," said the subaltern, brightly, "and as my unit is being flown out to-day, if I don't take it with me I shall have to leave it here and lose it."

Alec let him have it in no mean fashion. "Do you imagine that my squadron is flying over these ruddy mountains as a sort of private Carter Paterson for the likes of you? I've just brought two Jeeps from India and now you want me to take one back. Not bloody likely."

And so the matter ended, but if the subaltern had run into a sergeant-pilot, as he might well have done, the Jeeps might still be sailing backwards and forwards over those dangerous hills without the score of Jeeps in India or Imphal being appreciably changed. So the answer looks like more efficient movement control, not less use of aircraft by armies, to defeat the enemy.

We climbed into Alec's Dakota and flew back through the Bandits' Valley into Assam with a load of Gurkhas. Charles and I were posted at the windows, each in charge of a Browning, and so we earned our passage. We did two more trips that day across the Bandits' Valley, peering upwards through the windows into the clear blue sky, too clear and blue for anybody's liking. But we were lucky again and there was no sign of enemy fighters.

That night in Fatty's mess we drank our gins and listened to the stories of those magnificent air-crews who were the real heroes of this extraordinary war. As we sat back in the comfortable chairs the roar of the Dakotas beat as regularly as the feet of Francis Thomson's Hound of Heaven. They never stopped. To-night Frankie Bell was leading them deep into Burma, a Burma over which there was no moon and at a time of the year when the weather could not be relied upon to stay clear for more than a few minutes at a time.

It didn't that night. At four in the morning, just as the Dakotas were returning, one of those swift line-squalls blew up in the space of a few minutes and blotted out the airfield. The wind blew with terrific force and carried away the camp chapel. Several of the basha huts were blown down and an airman was killed. Overhead we could hear the Dakotas searching for the airfield in the wind and rain of the squall, while we dragged our beds from the open into the doubtful protection of the bashas. Next morning Frankie told us of his trip in a matter-of-fact way. He had just got in before the storm broke, but one Dakota of his flight had not made it in time and was missing. I remembered the storm in which Alec and I had been caught and thought of that brave crew hurrying through the gloom and lashing storm with their petrol slowly decreasing and no break such as we had through which to glimpse the ground and get their bearings. It seemed an even more magnificent enterprise than those of the Lancasters over Germany with their Pathfinders, their aids, and their armament. A defenceless Dakota flying at night through storms and darkness to bring aid and succour to our troops behind the enemy lines in Burma seemed, at any rate to me, to be one of the most daring and magnificent enterprises of the air war in any theatre.

I flew back to Delhi in one day with Andrew Rice. It was in the middle of May and the heat haze shut down visibility to less than a mile for most of the way, a distance equal to that separating London and Danzig. When I arrived in Delhi, Group-Captain Dodds from Air Ministry was waiting to take over from me.

A troopship was leaving Bombay.

My own story comes to an end at the beginning of June, looking over the stern of a trooper at the low outline of Bombay Harbour. The story of the

1944 war in Burma and on the Indian frontier was coming to an end as well, although it would be many weeks before the last of the Japanese soldiers had been thrown back across the Chindwin.

As our convoy slid confidently across the seas to England we heard on the ship's wireless of the day by day advances of the Fourteenth Army up the road from Kohima to Imphal. They must have been fighting against the rain and cloud and malaria of the monsoon season as much as against the Japs, who were trying in vain to maintain their grip on the road and so force the Dakotas to keep on supplying the garrison at Imphal through the monsoon cloud-banks. But the weakness of their supply lines, the badness of the weather, and the tough determination and confidence of the Fourteenth Army gradually forced them to weaken their grip on the road, and by the middle of June, at milestone 109, the advancing units from Imphal met the columns from Kohima. Imphal was relieved and from then on the process became one of mopping up the Japs on a grand scale. We captured Ukhrul, the village which had served for three months as the enemy headquarters. Only the units on the Bishenpur-Silchar track held on with tenacity to this subsidiary supply-line to India. Eventually the Gurkhas flung them off this mountain trail as well and, by July, Admiral Mountbatten was able to declare that a big victory had been won, that ten thousand Japs had been killed in the fighting around the Imphal Valley and forty thousand in all the Burma fighting since February. General Stilwell was not yet in complete possession of Myitkyina, but he held the airport, and the Dakotas were flying their loads right into the battle zone. A combined force of Stilwell's troops and General Lemaigre's Chindits took the key-town of Mogaung, south-west of Myitkyina, where the railway bends south in the direction of Mandalay. Others were moving north-east towards Bhamo to connect up with a Chinese force moving south-west from China. In fact, by the middle of July we had turned a formidable Jap force of three divisions out of India, destroying the major part of it in the process. We had crushed the crack 18th Division, the victors of Singapore, in the Hukong Valley. And we sat in most of the key-places of northern Burma. By this last achievement the Jap bases for any future air force, which he might move into Burma in place of that destroyed in this campaign, were pushed much farther south into the Rangoon area with resultant increased elbow-room for the Hump air traffic which could now operate almost entirely free from enemy opposition.

The planning at Quebec had been fulfilled to the letter. Wingate's methods had been justified beyond the wildest dreams and Anglo-American co-operation in the air had not only wiped a tough Japanese air force from the Burma skies, but had started a friendship and an understanding between Americans and British in South-East Asia which had shown itself to be more difficult of realization in this theatre than in any other. It must have been a moment of real comfort and pleasure for all concerned, American, Indian, British, Chinese, and Burman, when the late Prime Minister, on 2nd August, in the House of Commons devoted a large part of his early remarks to the deeds of the Fourteenth Army and its supporting air forces. His words, almost the first he had ever devoted in any length to this theatre, may be taken as the end of that mysterious campaign among the 'unprofitable jungles and swamps' of the Indo-Burma frontier and as the end of this story.

"In the Indian theatre the campaign in Burma has been difficult to follow in detail because of the ceaseless fighting and the intricate character of the country. Broadly speaking, it may be said that at Quebec last year we planned

advances into northern Burma with the object of giving greater security to the immense American air highway into China. I may mention that the American highway carried far more tonnage than was ever delivered, or likely to be delivered, in a measurable time over the old Burma Road. It carries it over what may be called the Hump—the vast mountain range of the Himalayas—and deals with an immense tonnage every month. This, of course, is of the greatest assistance to General Chiang Kai Shek and the Chinese in their long and hard-driven struggle. The House may imagine what a vast effort this achievement by the United States, indispensable to the life of China, has involved.

“We placed our hopes at Quebec in the new Supreme Commander, Admiral Mountbatten, and his brilliant lieutenant, Major-General Wingate, who alas! has paid the soldier’s debt. There was a man of genius who might have become also a man of destiny. He has gone, but his spirit lives on in the long-range penetration groups, and has underlain all these intricate and daring air operations and military operations based on air transport and air supply.

“The forward move which had been decided on at Quebec involved rather more than twenty-five thousand British and Imperial troops, with many more upon the long and precarious communications stretching back into India. This move met at an early stage a Japanese movement in the opposite direction which had for its object the invasion of India and the cutting of the American air highway. Thus these opposing forces came together in a collision at many points along the twelve-hundred-mile front in the early part of February and they have been locked in engagements of intense fierceness ever since, with the result that the Japanese have been flung backwards at every point.

“At the same time important centres in the north of Burma were captured by brilliant operations conducted by General Stilwell from the north with the participation of Chinese troops and with the invaluable support of the British long-range penetration groups operating against the enemy’s rear. The thanks of the country should go out to the British Fourteenth Army, which has done some of the hardest service in the whole of this war and must not be forgotten because of the violence and vividness of the larger and nearer events at home.

“Admiral Mountbatten and his commanders fought a successful and vigorous campaign in these unprofitable jungles and swamps in which their duty lies. The Japanese, everywhere driven back, sustained losses far exceeding our own. India has been successfully defended from invasion for another year, the air-line to China strengthened and maintained and danger warded farther off from its necessary bases.

“I thought it right to bring the Burma scene before the House because our men out there are cheered by the fact that the House of Commons follows with attentive eyes their fortunes and their achievements.”

On 2nd August, 1944, the Burma Front and the skies above it ceased to be the Forgotten Front to which brave and intelligent men of many nations had been accustomed to feel themselves banished. The significance of their victory, the hazards of their campaigning, and the appalling geography of their theatre of war had been made known in one of the greatest speeches of one of England’s greatest Prime Ministers. Their place in history was at last assured.

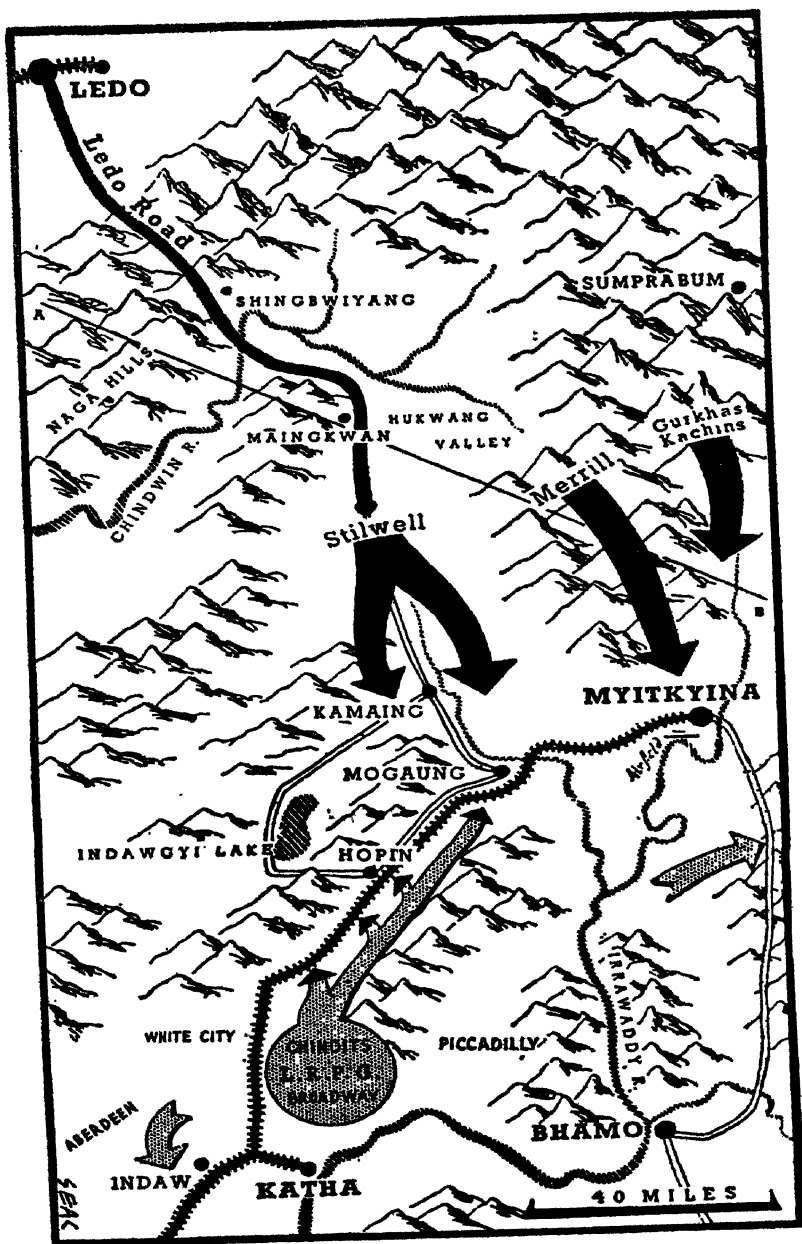
NOTES

Note.	Page.	
1	10	Gordon Lancaster won a D.F.C. and bar in Coastal Command after returning to England from India in the winter of 1942. In the winter of 1944 he was chosen by Air Chief-Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh Mallory to fly him to India, where the latter was to take over Air Command, South-East Asia, from Sir Richard Peirse. The York transport aircraft, piloted by Gordon Lancaster, crashed into the Central Massif in France in bad weather. Everyone on board was lost.
2	18	Martyrs' Day is the anniversary of the storming of Peshawar on 24th April, 1931. On that occasion many thousands of Red Shirts attacked the Cantonment at Peshawar and were repulsed with severe losses. The administration allows the occasion to be celebrated annually despite its potentially explosive atmosphere.
3	20	Wing-Commander (now Group Captain) Locke, D.F.C., A.F.C.
4	21	Wing-Commander Hogg, O.B.E., was murdered with several others, including his son, in the Simla rail-coach during the summer of 1942. The murderer was caught and hung.
5	22	Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Bart.
6	26	Tata Sons, Ltd., the biggest industrial firm in India with ramifications in the electrical, chemical, and steel industries. Pioneers of Civil Aviation in India.
7	27	John Murray's famous guide-book to India, Burma, and Ceylon.
8	34	The Japanese battleship <i>Nagato</i> was found by the U.S. Navy in Japanese home water after the Japanese capitulation, and is to be used, it appears, as a naval experimental target for the atomic bomb.
9	37	Air-Commodore Darvall had the distinction on 8th May, 1945—while A.O.C. of 46 Group Transport Command—of 'liberating' Norway from the Germans. He landed his Dakota at Oslo several hours before the arrival of the S.H.A.E.F. Mission which was bringing the surrender terms, a feat which confounded everybody except the Germans. The latter surrendered to him with their usual punctilio. There were 250,000 German troops in Norway at this time.
10	66	It has since been made public that Roger Bushell was in fact the 'organizing genius' who planned this mass escape. He was known to his fellow-prisoners as 'Big X'.
11	83	A stereoscope, or box, in which slides are fitted and revolved by hand in front of a lamp. The spectator looks into the box through eye-pieces and sees the photograph stand out in remarkable outline with uncanny stereoscopic effect. Air Chief-Marshal Harris, C-in-C. Bomber Command, evolved this instrument for the better appreciation of bomb damage photographs from his grandmother's trombone-like prototype, which many will remember as a common ancillary of the Victorian drawing-room—or so the story goes which I heard at Bomber Command H.Q. It was colloquially known

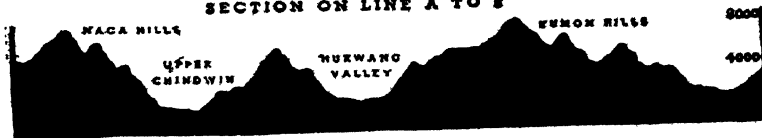
- | Note. | Page. | |
|-------|-------|---|
| | | as the Juke Box because of its supposed similarity and shape to the Italian musical or juke box. Incidentally, this appliance played a considerable part at the first Moscow Conference in persuading Marshal Stalin of the effectiveness of our bombing of Germany. |
| 12 | 101 | Lieut.-Colonel Stevens, South African Tea Board. |
| 13 | 106 | Captain John Fraser, M.C., Burma Rifles, who played a prominent part in Wingate's 1943 operation. He was a member of 5 Column, commanded by Major Bernard Fergusson, D.S.O., and is frequently mentioned in the latter's book, <i>Beyond the Chindwin</i> . |
| 14 | 108 | 'George' is the nickname given by R.A.F. pilots to the Gyroscopic, so-called automatic, pilot; a device which keeps an aircraft in straight and level flight with the minimum of attention from the pilot, thus saving much mental and physical strain on long trips. |
| 15 | 109 | The word 'box' used in a military sense seems to have become popular for the first time during the 1943 Arakan campaign. It denotes a defensive area cut off from normal lines of communication by the enemy, but still occupied by a fighting force, which is enabled to carry on by air supply and air superiority. |
| 16 | 111 | 'The Hump' was a colloquial American expression used to describe the difficult air passage from India to Free China over the Himalayas. When the Burma Road fell to the Japanese in March, 1942, the only method of bringing supplies to China was by air. In 1944 the volume of air supplies carried to China over the Hump by American aircraft was considerably greater than had ever gone over the Burma Road. The heavily-laden carriers had to fly from bases in Assam to Kunming and Chungking over mountains 20,000 feet high and through the worst flying weather in the world. It was a magnificent American achievement. |
| 17 | 117 | 'Flat Tops' is the American colloquial expression for aircraft carriers. |
| 18 | 121 | F.W. 190 is the Focke-Wulf fighter with wide under-carriage and radial engine, one of the best in the German Air Force. |

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- D.S.O.:** Distinguished Service Order.
D.F.C.: Distinguished Flying Cross.
A.O.C.-in-C.: Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief.
A.O.C.: Air Officer Commanding.
S.A.S.O.: Senior Air Staff Officer.
P.A.: Personal Assistant.
S-Ldr.: Admin.: Squadron-Leader in charge of Administration.
F.T.S.: Flying Training School.
A.H.Q.: Air Headquarters.
G.H.Q.: General Headquarters.
I.A.F.: Indian Air Force.
I.A.F.V.R.: Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve.
R.A.F.V.R.: Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.
G.R.: General Reconnaissance.
Reece: Reconnaissance.
Org.: Organization Branch of Staff.
L.A.C.: Leading Aircraftsman.
'Erk': R.A.F. slang for airman.
D.R.: Dead reckoning.
R-T.: Radio telephony.
T.A.F.: Tactical Air Force.
A.D.R.U.: Air Despatch and Reinforcement Unit.
Ack Ack: Anti-aircraft defences.
Tae R.: Tactical reconnaissance.
E.T.A.: Estimated Time of Arrival.
V.I.P.: Very Important Person.
P.R.U.: Photographic Reconnaissance Unit.
A.C.2.: Aircraftsman Second Class.
B.O.R.: British Other Rank.
I.O.R.: Indian Other Rank.
N.O.I.C.: Naval Officer-in-Charge.
X.D.O.: Extended Defence Office (R.N.).
F.A.A.: Fleet Air Arm.
A.M.C.: Armed Merchant Cruiser.
'Flags': Flag-Lieutenant.
A.D.C.: Aide-de-camp.
B.O.A.C.: British Overseas Airways Corporation.
A.P.: Associated Press (of America).
U.P.: United Press (of America).
Chindits: Colloquial title given to personnel of Wingate's first long-range penetration group.
A.V.C.: American Volunteer Group.
P.R.O.: Public Relations Officer.
I.C.S.: Indian Civil Service.
D.O.: Demi Official.
N.W.F.P.: North-West Frontier Province.
C.G.I.: Chief Ground Instructor.
Mali: An Indian Gardener.
Dewan: Indian title denoting the chief minister of a State, a post sometimes held by Englishmen.
Charpoy: An Indian bed, usually consisting of a wooden frame strung together with rough hemp or cord.
Shamlana: Indian expression for a large marquee.
Boxwallah: Indian expression denoting a business man.



SECTION ON LINE A TO B



E-de-CAMP'S LIBRARY

Accn. No. 701.....

s may be retained for a period not
exceeding fifteen days.